

METANOIA

Overview: To introduce the catechumens and inquirers to the Truth of the Orthodox faith and life through study, prayer, liturgy, and works of mercy.

Expectations: (for catechumens)

Attend all classes, as is possible.

Attend Great Vespers on Saturdays, Liturgy on Sundays and Feasts. Other services (i.e. Wednesday and occasional services, as possible)

Begin living the Orthodox life of prayer and giving of time, talent, and treasure.

Memorize Nicene Creed and “I believe, O Lord, and I confess...”

Need to think about: (for catechumens)

- ≡ Your sponsor (godparent). An Orthodox Christian of this parish of your gender who will pray for you and support you in your studies, to whom you can look as a brother or sister in Christ. Must be approved by the Priest.
- ≡ Your name. It is traditional to take the name of a Saint at one’s Baptism/Chrismation. As you read the Scriptures and learn about the lives of the saints, is there one with whom you resonate?
- ≡ Your reception into the Church: Baptism or Chrismation? (Not your choice...) The Church baptizes anyone who is not already baptized. Chrismation is the completion of a baptism done with water in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and recognized by the Church. Such a baptism will be shown by a certificate from the church or a letter on church letterhead from the church where one was baptized, confirming the official records. Where such cannot be reasonably demonstrated, one is baptized.



Project: “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:17) During this class, some sort of mercy ministry, outreach work, or other demonstration of Christian love. This could include taking part in Compassion in Action

1000 Great Books. Don’t get lost in them!

Required reading/listening

The Scriptures! (Orthodoxy Study Bible Recommended!)

“Rainbow Series” by Fr. Thomas Hopko (4 Volumes, easy reading) Also available online

The Orthodox Church by Bp. Kallistos Ware (Best overview. Lots of details.)

Lectures by Fr. Joaiah Trenham, Given Each Week by Fr. Gabriel

Highly recommended

The Incarnate God. (2 Volumes. On the 12 Great Feasts through readings, hymns, and icons)

Year in the Grace of the Lord by A Monk of the Orthodox Church (Commentary on the Sunday and Feastday readings for the Church year)

Thirsting for God in a Land of Shallow Wells. Matthew Gallatin

SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

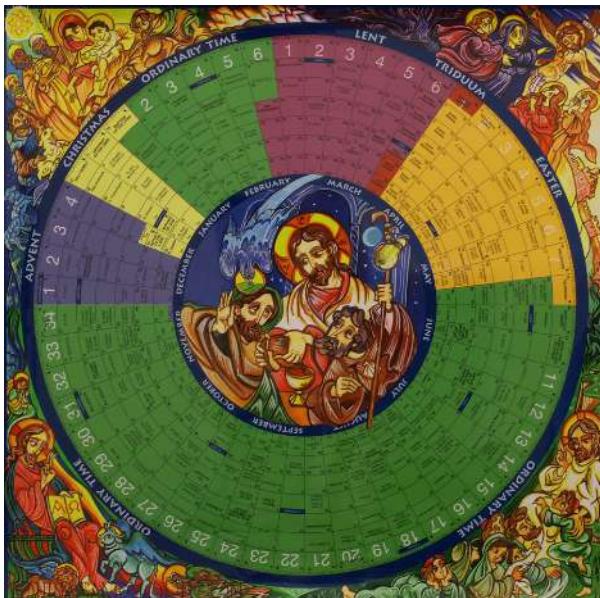
Each week, students should listen to the following week's lecture (provided by Fr. Gabriel) and provide 3 interesting take aways to share with the class! Perhaps share something that struck you, or maybe something that you don't understand and want more clarity on.

Orthodox Theology: Introduction to Orthodoxy and Holy Tradition

- Week 1:** The True God
- Week 2:** The Human Being
- Week 3:** Sin
- Week 4:** Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the World
- Week 5:** The Holy Spirit and Prayer
- Week 6:** The Church and Mary

"WE MAY STUDY AS MUCH AS WE WILL, BUT SHALL STILL NOT COME TO KNOW THE LORD UNLESS WE LIVE ACCORDING TO HIS COMMANDMENTS, FOR THE LORD IS NOT MADE KNOWN THROUGH LEARNING, BUT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT. MANY PHILOSOPHERS AND SCHOLARS HAVE ARRIVED AT A BELIEF IN THE EXISTENCE OF GOD, BUT THEY HAVE NOT COME TO KNOW GOD. WE MONKS APPLY OURSELVES DAY AND NIGHT TO THE STUDY OF THE LORD'S COMMAND, BUT NOT ALL OF US BY A LONG WAY WILL COME TO KNOW THE LORD, ALTHOUGH WE BELIEVE IN HIM."

-ST. SILOUAN THE ATHONITE



Faith and Worship:

- Week 7:** Holy Baptism and Chrismation
- Week 8:** Holy Eucharist
- Week 9:** Repentance and Confession
- Week 10:** Ecclesiology
- Week 11:** The Mystery of Marriage
- Week 12:** Holy Unction
- Week 13:** The Mystery of Death

O Lord our God, who dwells on high and looks upon the humble, who hast sent forth as the salvation of the race of men Thine only-begotten Son, and God, our Lord Jesus Christ, look upon thy servants the catechumens, who have bowed their necks before Thee. Vouchsafe unto them in due time the laver of regeneration, the forgiveness of sins, and the robe of incorruption. Unite them to thy Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, and number them with Thine elect flock!

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM'S BAPTISMAL INSTRUCTION EXCERPTS

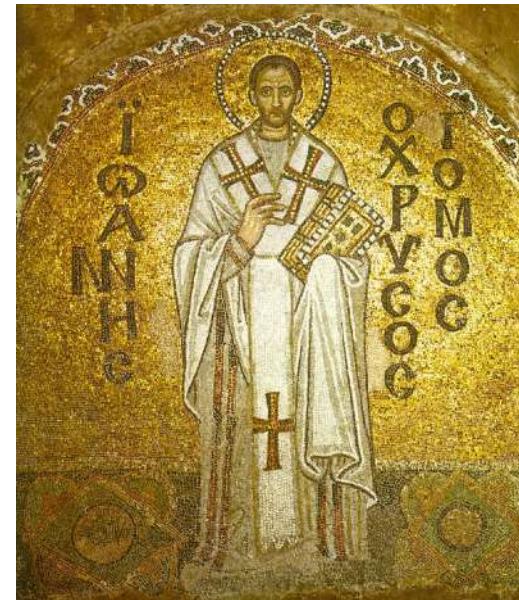
"For he who is about to approach these holy and dread mysteries must be awake and alert, must be clean from all cares of this life, full of much self-restraint, much readiness; he must banish from his mind every thought foreign to the mysteries, and on all sides cleanse and prepare his home, as if about to receive the king himself. Such is the preparation of your mind: such are your thoughts; such the purpose of your soul."

-Prepare now as you would when you are illuminated. Begin laying aside earthly cares when you are called to. Begin to detach yourself from worldly things as often as you can.

-For it does not make those who have touched dead bodies clean, but those who have set their hand to dead works: and if any man be effeminate, or a fornicator, or an idolator, or a doer of whatever ill you please, or if he be full of all the wickedness there is among men: should he fall into this pool of waters, he comes up again from the divine fountain purer than the sun's rays. And in order that you may not think that what is said is mere vain boasting, hear Paul speaking of the power of the laver, "Be not deceived: neither idolators, nor fornicators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor covetous, not drunkards, not revilers, not extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

And such were some of you, but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the spirit of our God. We promise to show you that they who approach the laver become clean from all fornication: but the word has shown more, that they have

become not only clean, but both holy and just, for it does not say only "you were washed," but also "you were sanctified and were justified"



-St. Paul is talking about Baptism and Chrismation being a complete transformation, not just a cleansing of sins done in the past. By completing your journey to Orthodoxy, you will be completely transformed, putting off the "Old Man", and coming alive in the new.

For the rest of your life, you need to emulate that...and it starts now!

-For in the wrestling schools, falls of the athletes are devoid of danger. For the wrestling is with friends, and they practice all their exercises on the persons of their teachers. But when the time of the contest has come, when the lists are open, when the spectators are seated above, when the president has arrived, it necessarily follows that the combatants, if they become careless, fall and retire in great disgrace, or if they are in earnest, win the crowns and the prizes. So then, in your case, let this time of preparation be both for exercise and practice: let us learn from thence already to get the better of that evil demon.

-There is no doubt that you will be attacked during your journey. The devil seeks to detract you from the path which you have Chosen to Christ. Be sure to be aware of his presence!

...this too he has bidden you do according to your power, with what has been entrusted to you, to extend the holiness which you have received, and to make the righteousness which comes from the laver brighter, and the gift of grace more radiant; even as therefore Paul did, increasing all the good things which he received by his subsequent labors, and his zeal, and his diligence. And look at the carefulness of God; neither did he give the whole to you then, nor withhold the whole, but gave part, and promised part. And for what reason did he not give the whole then? In order that you might show your faith about Him, believing, on his promise alone, in what was not yet given. And for what reason again did he not there dispense the whole, but did give the grace of the Spirit, and righteousness and sanctification? In order that he might lighten your labors for you, and by what has been already given may also put you in good hope for that which is to come.

-Once you have been received into the Holy Orthodox Church, this isn't the end of the journey, but rather only the beginning. You will get but a taste of the grace of God. In order to make that grow in your heart, it is your calling

to make the gift of Grace you will receive brighter, to enlighten the dark crevices of the fallen world. You do this by being the gentle presence of Christ amongst the chaos of life.



-In order, therefore, that we return not to our former vomit, let us henceforward discipline ourselves. For that we must repent beforehand, and desist from our former evil, and so come forward for grace, hear what John says, and what the leader of the apostles says to those who are about to be baptized. For the one says, "Bring forth fruit worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our Father;" (Luke 3:8) and the other says again to those who question him, "Repent ye and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 2:38) Now he who repents, no longer touches the same matters of which he repented. On this account, also, we are bidden to say, "I renounce you, Satan," in order that we may never more return to him. As therefore happens in the case of painters from life, so let it happen in your case. For they, arranging their boards, and tracing white lines upon them, and sketching the royal likeness in outline, before they apply the actual colors, rub out some lines, and change some for others, rectifying mistakes, and altering what is amiss with all freedom. But when they put on the coloring for good, it is no longer in their power to rub out again, and to change one thing for another, since they injure the beauty of the portrait, and the result becomes an eyesore. Consider that your soul is the portrait; before therefore the true coloring of the spirit comes, wipe out habits which have wrongly been implanted in you, whether swearing, or falsehood, or insolence, or base talking, or jesting, or whatever else you have a habit of doing of things unlawful. Away with the habit, in order that you may not return to it, after baptism. The laver causes the sins to disappear. Correct your habits, so that when the colors are applied, and the royal likeness is brought out, you may no more wipe them out in the future; and add damage and scars to the beauty which has been given you by God.



-Don't wait until you are received into the Church to start living like a Christian. If you struggle with anger, lust, pride, or any of the other vices in life, begin to ask God to help you struggle against them. Visit the poor, tithe to the Church, participate in Church Ministries, Volunteer your time and talents to the up-brining of this Holy Church, and be vigilant to the pry of the Devil, who will do all he can to pull you away from the path which you are on to Christ.

CHURCH ETIQUETTE

The Holy Orthodox Church is perhaps one of the last social institutions where dignity, protocol, respect, and reverence are maintained to the best of our ability. This is primarily because when we come to the church and its services, we are entering into the Kingdom of God on earth, His habitation, and we choose to honor this sacred place by our attentiveness to what is proper and ordered. We have the opportunity to reflect the image of Christ within us by our actions. *“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation”*. (1 Peter 2:9)

Entering the Church

The Orthodox Divine Liturgy begins when the priest intones “Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” We need to arrive early enough to receive this blessing. Arriving later can cause a distraction for others who are praying. If an occasional problem occurs and you have to come in late, enter the church reverently and quietly!



We come to the church on time, as if to a great banquet, and with reverence, because we are partaking of the very Body and Blood of Christ our Savior. Coming to Vespers before the Divine Liturgy (on Saturday evenings) is also vital. It is at the evening service that we learn about what we are celebrating (the life of a saint, etc)!

Standing in the Church

It is the custom of our parish to stand throughout the Divine Liturgy, with the exception of the sermon, Old Testament readings, or as directed by the priest. If you are unable to stand for the entire service due to health restrictions, or it is not something that you have been accustomed to in the past (and want to ease into it), it is important to at least stand at the beginning of the Liturgy, when the priest gives a blessing, during the Little and Great Entrances, when the priest is censing icons and the congregation, during Gospel readings, at the Anaphora, during Holy Communion, and at the final blessing.

When a Bishop is present, it is customary to stand and sit when he does, out of respect for His office.

Making the Sign of the Cross:

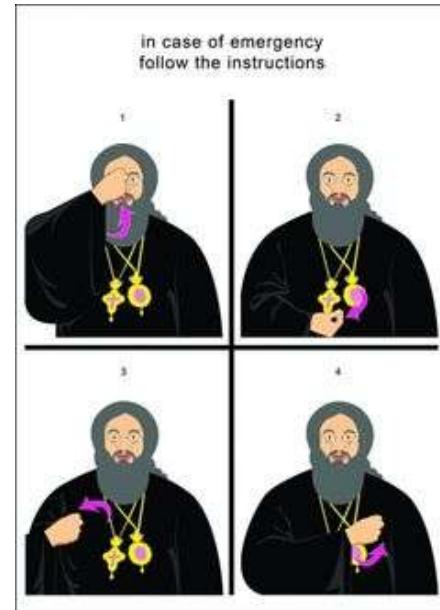
You will be doing this a lot! It is always appropriate to cross oneself at the mention of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), whenever leaving or entering the Church, at the beginning of Liturgy, when passing in front of the altar, when venerating an icon, the gospel, or the cross, and for personal petitions.

Orthodox Christians offer what is called a "metania", or bow, at certain times of the services, in the presence of icons, or before a relic. A small bow can be made when venerating icons or relics. A large bow (or prostration) is typically made for special occasions, especially during Great Lent, out of veneration or repentance.

Venerating Icons

The Ancient Christian Church teaches that it is proper to venerate, NOT TO WORSHIP, icons. The acceptable way to do this, is to make the sign of the cross (1-3 times) and to kiss either the hands or the feet of the saint depicted in the icon, or the scroll, Gospel book, or hand cross a saint is holding. Please try to refrain from wearing lipstick or chapstick when kissing icons. If you are wearing them, simply bow your head to the icon.

One should start with the icon in the back of the Church, then the icon in the center, the icon of Christ, and the icon of the Theotokos.



"IN ALL OUR TRAVELS AND MOVEMENTS, IN ALL OUR COMING IN AND GOING OUT, IN PUTTING ON OUR SHOES, AT THE BATH, AT THE TABLE, IN LIGHTING OUR CANDLES, IN LYING DOWN, IN SITTING DOWN, WHATEVER EMPLOYMENT OCCUPIES US, WE MARK OUR FOREHEADS WITH THE SIGN OF THE CROSS"
-TERTULLIAN, 2ND CENTURY

Lighting of Candles

It is a pious and ancient Christian tradition to light candles for personal petitions and intercessions when entering the Church. This should be done generally during the time that you are entering the Church!

Greeting a Priest or a Bishop

In our modern culture, we greet one another with a handshake. The exception to this is when we greet a member of the clergy. We typically do not shake a bishop or a priest's hand, but rather ask for a blessing. The proper way to do this is to approach a Bishop or a Priest with the right hand over the left, palms facing up, saying "Father Bless". He will give you a blessing (with his hands making the shape of ICXC...symbolizing that the blessing comes from Christ, not from the Bishop or Priest), and it is appropriate to kiss his hand.

Fasting

Before Holy Communion, and during various parts of the year, there might be a day (or a stretch of days/weeks) that the Church calls for us to fast from meat and dairy. Members of the Orthodox Church are to try, to the best of their ability, to fast when called for. However, it is understood that not everyone is able to have a strict fasting rule right away. It is highly encouraged to ease into fasting as you continue to progress in your spiritual life. See your parish priest for a personal fasting rule!

Home as a Little Church

We cannot get complete edification by spending a few hours at Church every week. There are over 160 hours in the week, and if we went to every Divine Liturgy and Vespers service offered, we might devote 3-4 hours of that time to being in God's House! A prayer rule is something that is vital to evening those numbers out, so that we are not as bombarded with the temptations of the world!

The first thing that is needed is to create a sacred place in your house called an "icon corner". Get the icons of your patron saints, one of Christ and the Theotokos, a candle, and perhaps some incense. When you are preparing to do your prayer rule (as assigned by the priest), clear your mind of everything that has been bothering you for the day, light your candle, turn out the lights, and begin your prayers.

Remember, Orthodoxy is not an exercise of the mind...it is about developing and experiencing a relationship with God. We do this through personal and communal prayer...and establishing these habits now is VITAL!



Almsgiving and Stewardship

Finally, when you are apart of an Orthodox Parish, you cannot be passive in your new responsibility to strengthen the Body of Christ! Every member of the parish not only supports the parish financially (to the best of their ability), but they also take part in a ministry to help support the work of the Church. Begin thinking about what ministry you might want to be a part of, if or when you are brought into the Orthodox Church.

WEEK 1: THE TRUE GOD AND PRAYER

LET US GO AND RETURN TO THE LORD OUR GOD; FOR HE HAS GRASPED AND WILL HEAL US. IN THE THIRD DAY WE SHALL RISE AND LIVE BEFORE HIM. LET US KNOW, LET US PURSUE, THAT WE MAY KNOW THE LORD. (HOSEA 6:1)

Observation or Question # 1 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 2 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 3 from Online Class:

An Experience of God

St. Seraphim of Sarov's Conversation With Nicholas Motovilov

I'm sure all of us from time to time, have tried to imagine what Heaven is like. When we put our mind to work, we might come up with all sorts of various images, based off of our own world experiences, or what we might have heard or seen in a movie or television show.

For the Eastern Orthodox Church, Heaven is not a "place" so to speak...it is a person. Heaven is being in the eternal presence of the Grace of God, Who illuminates all of creation with His Divine Light!

St. Seraphim in this conversation with Nicholas Motovilov, one of his spiritual children, describes the Aim of the Life of a Christian: Obtaining the Holy Spirit.

The Aim of the Christian Life

"It was Thursday," writes Motovilov. "The day was gloomy. The snow lay eight inches deep on the ground; and dry, crisp snowflakes were falling thickly from the sky when St. Seraphim began his conversation with me in a field near his hermitage, opposite the river Sarovka, at the foot of the hill which slopes down to the river bank. He sat me on the stump of a tree which he had just cut down, and squatted opposite me.

"The Lord has revealed to me," said the great elder, "that in your childhood you had a great desire to know the aim of our Christian life, and that you have continually asked many great spiritual persons about it."

I must admit, that from the age of twelve this thought had constantly troubled me. In fact, I had approached many clergy about it, however their answers had not satisfied me. This could not have been known to the elder.

"But no one," continued St. Seraphim, "has given you a precise answer. They have said to you: 'Go to church, pray to God, do the commandments of God, do good—that is the aim of the Christian life.' Some were even indignant with you for being occupied with such profane curiosity and said to you, 'Do not seek things which are beyond you.' But they did not speak as they should. Now humble Seraphim will explain to you of what this aim really consists.

"However prayer, fasting, vigil and all the other Christian practices may be, they do not constitute the aim of our Christian life. Although it is true that they serve as the indispensable



means of reaching this end, the true aim of our Christian life consists of the **acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God**. As for fasts, and vigils, and prayer, and almsgiving, and every good deed done for Christ's sake, they are the only a means of acquiring the Holy Spirit of God. Mark my words, only good deeds done for Christ's sake brings us the fruits of the Holy Spirit. All that is not done for Christ's sake, even though it be good, brings neither reward in the future life nor the grace of God in this life. That is why our Lord Jesus Christ said: *He who does not gather with Me scatters* (Luke 11:23). Not that a good deed can be called anything but gathering, even though a deed is not done for Christ's sake, it is still considered good. The Scriptures say: *In every nation he who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to Him* (Acts 10:35).

"As we see from another sacred narrative, the man who does what is right is pleasing to God. We see the Angel of the Lord appeared at the hour of prayer to Cornelius, the God-fearing and righteous centurion, and said: 'Send to Joppa to Simon the Tanner; there you will find Peter and he will tell you the words of eternal life, whereby you will be saved and all your house.' Thus the Lord uses all His divine means to give such a man, in return for his good works, the opportunity not to lose his reward in the future life. But to this end, we must begin with a right faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who came into the world to save sinners and Who, through our acquiring for ourselves the grace of the Holy Spirit, brings into our hearts the Kingdom of God, and opens the way for us to win the blessings of the future life.

"The acceptability to God of good deeds not done for Christ's sake is limited to this: the Creator gives the means to make them living (cf. Hebrews. 6:1). It rests with man to make them living or not. That is why the Lord said to the Jews: *If you had been blind, you would have had no sin. But now you say 'We see,' so your sin remains* (John 9:41). If a man like Cornelius enjoys the favor of God for his deeds, though not done for Christ's sake, and then believes in His Son, such deeds will be imputed to him as done for Christ's sake. But in the opposite event a man has no right to complain, when the good he has done is useless. It never is, when it is done for Christ's sake, since good done for Him not only merits a crown of righteousness in the world to come, but also in this present life fills us with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, it is said: *God does not give the Spirit by measure* (John 3:34-35).

"That is it, your Godliness. Acquiring the Spirit of God is the true aim of our Christian life, while prayer, fasting, almsgiving and other good works done for Christ's sake are merely **means** for acquiring the Spirit of God."

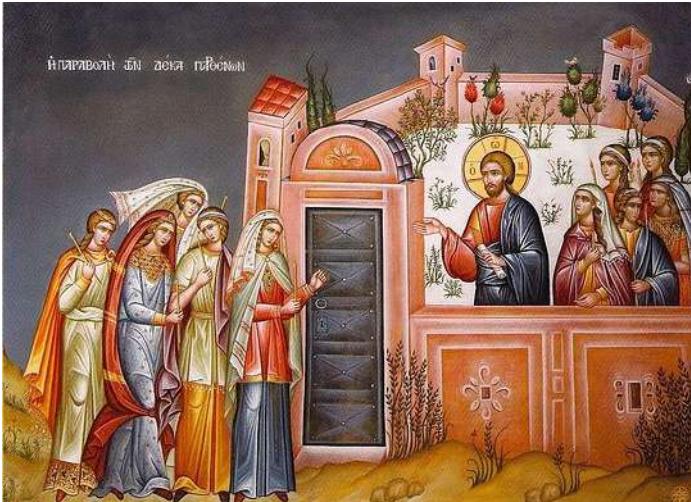
How Do We Acquire the Holy Spirit? Parable of the Wise Virgins

"What do you mean by acquiring?" I asked St. Seraphim. "Somehow I don't understand that."

"Acquiring is the same as obtaining," he replied. "Do you understand, what acquiring money means? Acquiring the Spirit of God is exactly the same. You know very well enough what it means to acquire in a worldly sense, your Godliness. The aim of ordinary worldly people is to acquire or make money; and for the nobility, it is in addition to receive honors, distinctions and other rewards for their services to the government. The acquisition of God's Spirit is also capital, but grace-giving and eternal, and it is obtained in very similar ways, almost the same ways as monetary, social and temporal capital.

"God the Word, the God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, compares our life with the market, and the work of our life on earth He calls trading. He says to us all: *Trade till I come* (Lk. 19:13), *buying up every opportunity, because the days are evil* (Ephesians 5:16). In other words, make the most of your time getting heavenly blessings through earthly goods. Earthly goods are good works done for Christ's sake that confer the grace of the All-Holy Spirit, on us.

"In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, when the foolish ones ran short of oil, they were told: 'Go and buy in the market.' But when they had bought it, the door of the bride-chamber was already shut and they could not get in. Some say that the lack of oil in the lamps of the foolish virgins means a lack of good deeds in their lifetime. Such an interpretation is not quite correct. Why should they be lacking in good deeds, if they are called virgins, even though foolish ones? Virginity is the supreme virtue, an angelic state, and it could take the place of all other good works.



"I think that what they were lacking was the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God. These virgins practiced the virtues, **but in their spiritual ignorance they supposed that the Christian life consisted merely in doing good works.** By doing a good deed they thought they were doing the work of God, but they cared little whether they acquired the grace of God's Spirit. These ways of life, based merely on doing good, without carefully testing whether they

bring the grace of the Spirit of God, are mentioned in the patristic books: 'There is another way which is deemed good in the beginning, but ends at the bottom of hell.'

"Anthony the Great in his letters to monks says of such virgins: 'Many monks and virgins have no idea of the different kinds of wills which act in man, and they do not know that we are influenced by three wills: the first is God's all-perfect and all-saving will; the second is our own human will which, if not destructive, neither is it saving; and the third will is the devil's will—wholly destructive.' This third will of the enemy prompts man to do any no good deeds, or to do them good out of vanity, or merely for virtue's sake rather than for Christ's sake. The second, our own will, prompts us to do everything to flatter our passions, or else it teaches us like the enemy, to do good for the sake of good and not care for the grace which is acquired by it. But the first, God's all-saving will, consists in doing good solely to acquire the Holy Spirit, as an eternal, inexhaustible treasure which is priceless.

The acquisition of the Holy Spirit is, in a manner of speaking, the oil, which the foolish virgins lacked. They were called foolish just because they had forgotten the necessary fruit of virtue, the grace of the Holy Spirit, without which no one is or can be saved, for: 'Through the Holy Spirit every soul is quickened and through purification is exalted and illumined by the Triune Unity in a Holy mystery.'

"The oil in the lamps of the wise virgins could burn brightly for a long time. So these virgins, with their bright lamps were able to meet the Bridegroom, who came at midnight. With Him, they could enter the bridal chamber of joy. But the foolish ones, though they went to market to buy more oil, when their lamps were going out, were unable to return in time, for the door was already shut. The market is our life; the door of the bridal chamber, which was shut and barred the way to the Bridegroom is human death; the wise and foolish virgins are Christian souls; the oil is not the good deeds, but the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God which is obtained through good deeds and which changes souls from one state to another—such as, from a corruptible state to incorruptible state, from spiritual death to spiritual life, from darkness to light, from the stable of our being (where the passions are tied up like dumb animals and wild beasts) into a temple of the Divinity, the shining bridal chamber of eternal joy in Christ Jesus our Lord, the Creator, Redeemer and eternal Bridegroom of our souls.

"How great is God's compassion on our misery, that is to say, our inattention to His care for us, when God says: *Behold, I stand at the door and knock* (Rev. 3:20), meaning by "door" the course of our life which has not yet been closed by death! Oh, how I wish, your Godliness, that in this life you may always be in the Spirit of God! 'In whatsoever I find you, in that will I judge you,' says the Lord.

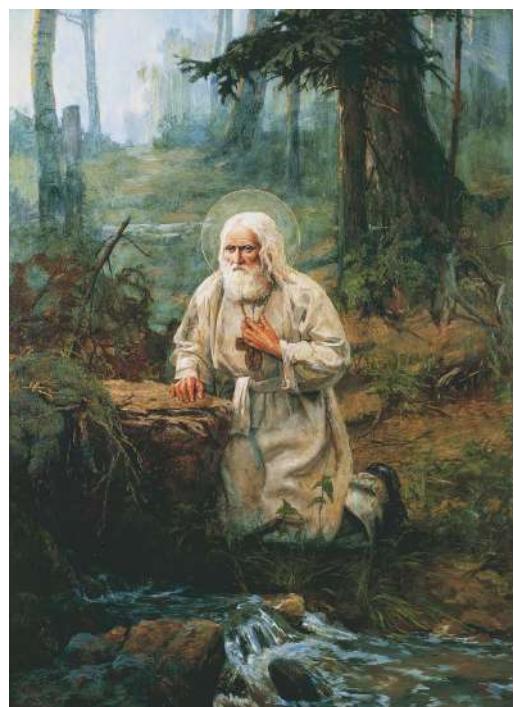
"Woe betide us if He finds us overcharged with the cares and sorrows of this life! For who will be able to bear His anger, who will bear the wrath of His countenance? That is why it has been said: *Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation* (Mk. 14:38), that is, lest you be deprived of the Spirit of God, for watching and prayer brings us His grace.

The Importance and Emphasis on the Prayer Life

"Of course, every good deed done for Christ's sake gives us the grace of the Holy Spirit, but **prayer gives us this grace most of all**, for it is always at hand, as an instrument for acquiring the grace of the Spirit. For instance, you would like to go to church, but there is no church or the service is over; you would like to give alms to a beggar, but there isn't one, or you have nothing to give; you would like to preserve your virginity, but you have not the strength to do so because of your temperament, or because of the violence of the wiles of the enemy which because of your human weakness you cannot withstand; you would like to do some other good deed for Christ's sake, but either you have not the strength or the opportunity is lacking. This certainly does not apply to prayer. Prayer is always possible for everyone, rich and poor, noble and humble, strong and weak, healthy and sick, righteous and sinful.

"You may judge how great the power of prayer is even in a sinful person, when it is offered whole-heartedly, by the following example from Holy Tradition. When at the request of a desperate mother who had been deprived by death of her only son, a harlot whom she chanced to meet, still unclean from her last sin, and who was touched by the mother's deep sorrow, cried to the Lord: 'Not for the sake of a wretched sinner like me, but for the sake of the tears of a mother grieving for her son and firmly trusting in Thy loving kindness and Thy almighty power, Christ God, raise up her son, O Lord!' And the Lord raised him up.

"You see, your Godliness! Great is the power of prayer, and it brings most of all the Spirit of God, and is most easily practiced by everyone. We shall be happy indeed if the Lord God finds us watchful and filled with the gifts of His Holy Spirit. Then we may boldly hope *to be caught up . . . in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air* (1 Thess. 4:17) Who is coming *with great power and glory* (Mk. 13:26) to *judge the living and the dead* (1 Peter 4:5) and *to reward every man according to his works* (Matt. 16:27).



"Your Godliness deigns to think it a great happiness to talk to poor Seraphim, believing that even he is not bereft of the grace of the Lord. What then shall we say of the Lord Himself, the never-failing source of every blessing both heavenly and earthly? Truly in prayer we are granted to converse with Him, our all-gracious and life-giving God and Savior Himself. But even here we must pray only until God the Holy Spirit descends on us in measures of His heavenly grace known to Him. And when He deigns to visit us, we must stop praying. Why should we then pray to Him, 'Come and abide in us and cleanse us from all impurity and save our souls, O Good One,' when He has already come to us to save us, who trust in Him, and truly call on His holy Name, that humbly and lovingly we may receive Him, the Comforter, in the mansions of our souls, hungering and thirsting for His coming?

"I will explain this point to your Godliness through an example. Imagine that you have invited me to pay you a visit, and at your invitation I come to have a talk with you. But you continue to invite me, saying: 'Come in, please. Do come in!' Then I should be obliged to think: 'What is the matter with him? Is he out of his mind?'

"So it is with regard to our Lord God the Holy Spirit. That is why it is said: *Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth* (Ps. 45[46]:10). That is, I will appear and will continue to appear to everyone who believes in Me and calls upon Me, and I will converse with him as once I conversed with Adam in Paradise, with Abraham and Jacob and other servants of Mine, with Moses and Job, and those like them.

Many explain that this stillness refers only to worldly matters; in other words, that during prayerful converse with God you must 'be still' with regard to worldly affairs. But I will tell you in the name of God that not only is it necessary to be dead to them at prayer, but when by the omnipotent power of faith and prayer our Lord God the Holy Spirit condescends to visit us, and comes to us in the plenitude of His unutterable goodness, we must be dead to prayer too.

"The soul speaks and converses during prayer, but at the descent of the Holy Spirit we must remain in complete silence, in order to hear clearly and intelligibly all the words of eternal life which he will then deign to communicate. Complete soberness of soul and spirit, and chaste purity of body is required at the same time. The same demands were made at Mount Horeb, when the Israelites were told not even to touch their wives for three days before the appearance of God on Mount Sinai. For our God is a fire which consumes everything unclean, and no one who is defiled in body or spirit can enter into communion with Him."

The Acquisition of Grace

"Yes, father, but what about other good deeds done for Christ's sake in order to acquire the grace of the Holy Spirit? You have only been speaking of prayer."

"Acquire the grace of the Holy Spirit also by practicing all the other virtues for Christ's sake. Trade spiritually with them; trade with those which give you the greatest profit. Accumulate capital from the superabundance of God's grace, deposit it in God's eternal bank which will bring you immaterial interest, not four or six per cent, but one hundred per cent for one spiritual rouble, and even infinitely more than that. For example, if prayer and watching gives you more of God's grace, watch and pray; if fasting gives you much of the spirit of God, fast; if almsgiving gives you more, give alms. Weigh every virtue done for Christ's sake in this manner.

"Now I will tell you about myself, poor Seraphim. I come from a merchant family in Kursk. So when I was not yet in the monastery we used to trade with the goods which brought us the greatest profit. Act like that, my son. And just as in business the main point is not merely to trade, but to get as much profit as possible, so in the business of the Christian life the main point is not merely to pray or to do some other good deed. Though the apostle says: *Pray without ceasing* (1 Thess. 5:17), yet, as you remember, he adds: *I would rather speak five words with my understanding than ten thousand words with a tongue* (1 Cor. 14:19). And the Lord says: *Not everyone who says to Me: Lord, Lord, shall be saved, but he who does the will of My Father* (Mt. 7:21), that is he who does the work of God and, moreover, does it with reverence, for *cursed is he who does the work of God negligently* (Jer. 48:10). And the work of God is: believe in God and in Him Whom He has sent, Jesus Christ (John 14:1; 6:29). If we understand the commandments of Christ and of the Apostles aright, our business as Christians consists not in increasing the number of our good deeds which are only the means of furthering the purpose of our Christian life, but in deriving from them the utmost profit, that is in acquiring the most abundant gifts of the Holy Spirit.

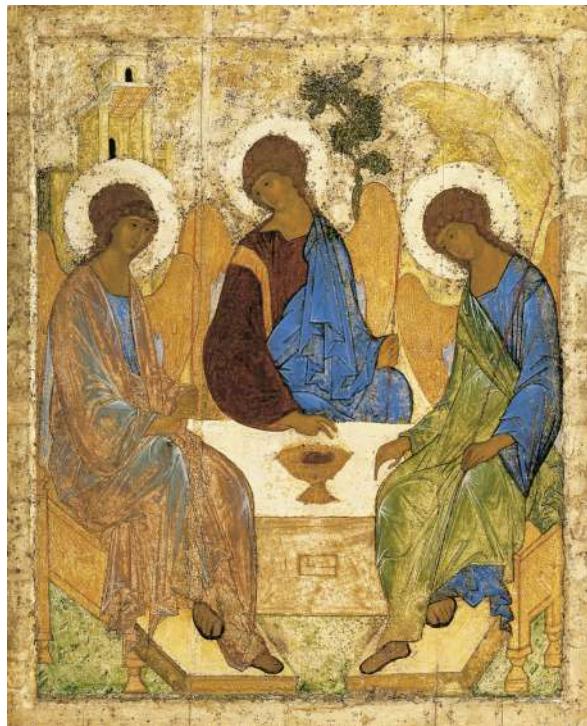
"How I wish, your Godliness, that you yourself may acquire this inexhaustible source of divine grace, and may always ask yourself: Am I in the Spirit of God, or not?—there is nothing to grieve about. You are ready to appear before the awful judgment of Christ immediately. For 'In whatsoever I find you, in that will I judge you.' But if we are not in the Spirit, we must discover why not and what reason our Lord God the Holy Spirit has willed to abandon us. We must seek Him again and must go on searching until our Lord God the Holy Spirit has been found and is with us again, through His goodness. We must attack the enemies that drive us away from Him until even their dust is no more, as the Prophet David has said, *I will pursue my enemies and overtake them; and I will not turn back till they are destroyed. I will crush them and they will be unable to stand; they will fall under my feet* (Ps. 17[18]:38-39).

"That's it, my son. That is how you must spiritually trade in virtue. Distribute the Holy Spirit's gifts of grace to those in need of them, just as a lighted candle burning with earthly fire shines itself and lights other candles for the illumining of all in other places, without diminishing its own light. If it is so, with regard to the earthly fire, what shall we say about the fire of the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God? For earthly riches decrease with distribution, but the more the heavenly riches of God's grace are distributed, the more they increase in the one who distributes them. Thus the Lord Himself was pleased to say to the Samaritan woman: *All who drink this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water that I shall give him will never be thirsty any more; but the water that I shall give him will be in him a spring of water leaping up to eternal life* (John 4:13-14)."

The Presence of the Holy Spirit in History

"Father," said I, "you speak all the time of the acquisition of the grace of the Holy Spirit as the aim of the Christian life. But how and where can I see it? Good deeds are visible, but can the Holy Spirit be seen? How am I to know whether He is with me or not?"

"At the present time," the elder replied, "Owing to our almost universal coldness to our holy faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and our inattention to the working of His Divine Providence in us, and to the communion of man with God, we have gone so far that, one may say, we have almost abandoned the true Christian life. The testimonies of Holy Scripture now seem strange to us; when, for instance, by the lips of Moses the Holy Spirit says: 'And Adam saw the Lord walking in Paradise' (cf. Gen. 3:10), or when we read the words of the Apostle Paul: 'We went to Achaia, and the Spirit of God went not with us; we returned to Macedonia, and the Spirit of God came with us.' More than once in other passages of Holy Scripture the appearance of God to men is mentioned.



"That is why some people say: 'These passages are incomprehensible. Is it really possible for people to see God so openly?' But there is nothing incomprehensible here. This failure to understand has come about because we have departed from the simplicity of the original Christian knowledge. Under the pretext of education, we have reached such a darkness of ignorance, that the things the ancients understood so clearly, seem to us almost inconceivable. Even in ordinary conversation, the idea of God's appearance among men did not seem strange to them. Thus, when his friends rebuked him for blaspheming God, Job

answered them: 'How can that be when I feel the Spirit of God in my nostrils?' (cf. Job 27:3). That is, 'How can I blaspheme God when the Holy Spirit abides with me? If I had blasphemed God, the Holy Spirit would have withdrawn from me; but look! I feel His breath in my nostrils.'

"It is said that Abraham and Jacob saw the Lord and conversed with Him in exactly the same way, and that Jacob even wrestled with Him. Moses and all the people with him saw God, when he received the tablets of the law on Mount Sinai from God. A pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire, or in other words, the evident grace of the Holy Spirit, served as guides to God's people in the desert. People saw God and the grace of His Holy Spirit not during sleep, in dreams, or in the excitement of a disordered imagination, but truly and openly.

"We have become so inattentive to the work of our salvation, that we misinterpret many other words in Holy Scripture as well, all because we do not seek the grace of God and in the pride of our minds, do not allow it to dwell in our souls. That is why we are without true enlightenment from the Lord, which He sends into the hearts of men who hunger and thirst wholeheartedly for God's righteousness or holiness.

"Many explain the part in the Bible, *God breathed the breath of life into the face of Adam* the first-created, who was created by Him from the dust of the ground, it must mean that until that moment there was neither human soul nor spirit in Adam, but only the flesh created from the dust of the ground. This interpretation is wrong, for the Lord created Adam from the dust of the ground with the constitution which the holy Apostle Paul describes: *May your spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Thess. 5:23). And all these parts of our nature were created from the dust of the ground, and Adam was not created dead, but an active being like all of God's animate creatures living on earth.

"The point is, that if the Lord God had not breathed afterwards into his face, this *breath of life*—that is, the **grace** of our Lord God the Holy Spirit Who proceeds from the Father, rests in the Son and is sent into the world for the Son's sake—Adam would have remained without the Holy Spirit within him. It is the Holy Spirit who raised Adam to Godlike dignity. However perfect, he had been created and superior to all the other creatures of God, as the crown of creation on earth, he would have been just like all the other creatures, though they have a body, soul and spirit, each according to its kind, do not have the Holy Spirit within them. But when the Lord God breathed into Adam's face the breath of life, then, according to Moses' word, *Adam became a living soul* (Gen. 2:7), that is, completely and in every-way like God, and like Him, forever immortal. Adam was immune to the action of the elements to such a degree that water could not drown him, fire could not burn him, the earth could not swallow him in its abysses, and the air could not harm him by any kind of action whatever. Everything was subject to him as the

beloved of God, as the king and lord of creation, and everything looked up to him, as the perfect crown of God's creatures. Adam was made so wise by this breath of life, which was breathed into his face from the creative lips of God, the Creator and Ruler of all, that there has never been a man on earth wiser or more intelligent, and it is unlikely that there ever will be. When the Lord commanded him to give names to all the creatures, he gave every creature a name which completely expressed all the qualities, powers and properties given it by God at its creation.

"As a result of this gift, of the supernatural grace of God, which was infused into him by the breath of life, Adam could see, understand the Lord walking in Paradise, comprehend His words, understand the conversation of the holy Angels, the language of all beasts, birds and reptiles and all that is now hidden from us the fallen and sinful creatures. All this was so clear to Adam before his fall. The Lord God also gave Eve the same wisdom, strength, unlimited power, and all the other good and holy qualities. He created her not from the dust of the ground, but from Adam's rib in the Eden of delight, the Paradise which He had planted in the midst of the earth.

"In order that they might always easily maintain the immortal, divine and perfect properties of this breath of life, God planted in the midst of the garden the *tree of life* with fruits endowed with all the essence and fullness of His divine breath. If they had not sinned, Adam and Eve themselves as well as all their posterity could have always eaten of the fruit of the tree of life and so would have eternally maintained the vivifying power of divine grace.

"They could have also maintained for all eternity the full powers of their body, soul and spirit in a state of immortality and perpetual youth, and they could have continued in this immortal and blessed state of theirs forever. At the present time, however, it is difficult for us even to imagine such grace.

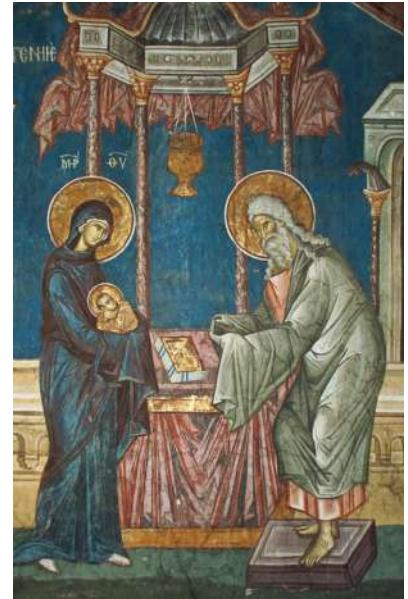
"But through the tasting of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—which was premature and contrary to the commandment of God—they learnt the difference between good and evil and were subjected to all the afflictions which followed the transgression of the commandment of God. Then they lost this priceless gift of the grace of the Spirit of God, so that, until the actual coming into the world of the God-man Jesus Christ, *the Spirit of God was not yet in the world because Jesus was not yet glorified* (John 7:39).

"However, that does not mean that the Spirit of God was not in the world at all, but His presence was not so apparent. It manifested only externally, and only the signs of His presence in the world were known to mankind. Thus, for instance, many mysteries in connection with the future salvation of the human race were revealed to Adam as well as to Eve after their fall. For

Cain, in spite of his impiety and his transgression, it was easy for him to understand the voice which held grace and divinity, though convicting words. Noah conversed with God. Abraham saw God and His day and was glad (from John 8:56). The grace of the Holy Spirit acting externally was also reflected in all the Old Testament prophets and saints of Israel. Afterwards, the Hebrews established special prophetic schools where the sons of the prophets were taught to discern the signs of the manifestation of God or Angels, and to distinguish the operations of the Holy Spirit from the ordinary natural phenomena of graceless earthly life. Simeon who held God in his arms, Christ's grandparents Joachim and Anna, and countless other servants of God continually often had various divine apparitions, revelations and heard voices, which were corroborated by evident miraculous events. Though not with the same power as in the people of God, nevertheless the presence of the Spirit of God also acted in the pagans who did not know the true God, because even among them, God found the chosen people. For instance, there were the virgin-prophetesses called Sibyls who vowed virginity to an unknown God, but to God, the Creator of the universe, the all-powerful ruler of the world, as He was conceived by the pagans. Though the pagan philosophers also wandered in the darkness of ignorance of God, yet they sought the truth which is beloved by God. Because of this, God-pleasing seeking, they could partake of the Spirit of God. It is said, that nations who do not know God, practice by nature the demands of the law and do what is pleasing to God (cf. Rom. 2:14). The Lord so praises truth that He says of it Himself by the Holy Spirit: *Truth has sprung from the earth, and justice has looked down from heaven* (Ps. 84[85]:11).

"So you see, your Godliness, both in the holy Hebrew people, a people beloved by God, and in the pagans who did not know God, there was preserved a knowledge of God—thus, my son, a clear and rational comprehension of how our Lord God the Holy Spirit acts in man, and by means of our inner and outer feelings, one can be sure that this is really the action of our Lord God the Holy Spirit, and not a delusion of the enemy. That is how it was, from Adam's fall, until the coming into the world of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the flesh.

"Without this perceptible realization of the actions of the Holy Spirit which had always been preserved in human nature, men could not have possibly known for certain whether the fruit of the seed of the woman who had been promised to Adam and Eve had come into the world to crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15).



"At last the Holy Spirit foretold to St. Simeon, who was then in his 65th year, the mystery of the virginal conception and birth of Christ from the most pure Ever-Virgin Mary. Afterwards, having lived by the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God for three hundred years, in the 365th year of his life he said openly in the temple of the Lord that he knew for certain through the gift of the Holy Spirit that this was that very Christ, the Savior of the world, Whose supernatural conception and birth from the Holy Spirit had been foretold to him by an Angel three hundred years previously.

And there was also St. Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, who from her widowhood had served the Lord God in the temple of God for eighty years, and who was known to be a righteous widow, a chaste servant of God, from the special gifts of grace which she had received. She too announced that He was actually the Messiah Who had been promised to the world, the true Christ, God and Man, the King of Israel, Who had come to save Adam and mankind.

"But when our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished the whole work of salvation, after His Resurrection, He breathed on the Apostles, restored the breath of life lost by Adam, and gave them the same grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God as Adam had enjoyed. But that was not all. He also told them that it was better for them that He should go to the Father, for if He did not go, the Spirit of God would not come into the world. But if He, the Christ, went to the Father, He would send Him into the world, and He, the Comforter, would guide them and all who followed their teaching into all truth and would remind them of all that He had said to them when He was still in the world. What was then promised was *grace upon grace* (John 1:16).

"Then on the day of Pentecost He solemnly sent down to them in a tempestuous wind the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire which alighted on each of them and entered within them and filled them with the fiery strength of divine grace which breathes as with dew and acts with gladness in souls who partake of its power and operations (Acts ch. 2). And this same fire-infusing grace of the Holy Spirit which is given to us all, the faithful in Christ, in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, is sealed by the Sacrament of Chrismation on the chief parts of our body as appointed by the Holy Church, the eternal keeper of this grace. It is said: 'The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.' On what do we put our seals, your Godliness, if not on vessels containing some very precious treasure? But what on earth can be higher and what can be more precious than the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are sent down to us from above in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism? This baptismal grace is so great and so indispensable, so vital for man, that even a heretic is not deprived of it until his actual death; that is, till the end of the period appointed on high by the providence of God as a lifelong test of man on earth, in order to see what he will be able to

achieve (during this period given to him by God) by means of the power of grace granted to him from on high.

"And if we were never to sin after our baptism, we should remain for ever saints of God, holy, blameless, and free from all impurity of body and spirit. But the trouble is that we increase in stature, but do not increase in grace and in the knowledge of God as our Lord Jesus Christ increased; but on the contrary, we gradually become more and more depraved and lose the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God and become sinful in various degrees, and very sinful people. But if a man is stirred by the wisdom of God, which seeks our salvation and embraces everything, and if he is resolved for its sake to devote the early hours of the day to God and to watch in order to find His eternal salvation, then, in obedience to its voice, he must hasten to offer true repentance for all his sins and must practice the virtues which are opposite to the sins committed. Then through the virtues practiced for Christ's sake, he will acquire the Holy Spirit Who acts within us and establishes in us the Kingdom of God. The word of God does not say in vain: *The Kingdom of God is within you* (Luke 17:21), and *it suffers violence, and the violent take it by force* (Matt. 11:12). That means that people who, in spite of the bonds of sin which fetter them and (by their violence and by inciting them to new sins) prevent them from coming to Him, our Savior, with perfect repentance for reckoning with Him. They force themselves to break their bonds, despising all the strength of the fetters of sin—such people at last actually appear before the face of God made whiter than snow by His grace. *Come, says the Lord: Though your sins be as purple, I will make you white as snow* (Is. 1:18).

"Such people were once seen by the holy Seer John the Divine *clothed in white robes* (that is, in robes of justification) and with *palms in their hands* (as a sign of victory), and they were singing to God a wonderful song: *Alleluia*. And no one could imitate the beauty of their song. Of them an Angel of God said: *These are they who have come out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb* (Rev. 7:9-14). They were washed with their sufferings and made white in the communion of the immaculate and life-giving Mysteries of the Body and Blood of the most pure and spotless Lamb—Christ—Who was slain before all ages by His own will for the salvation of the world, and Who is continually being slain and divided until now, but is never exhausted (in the Sacrament of Communion). Through the Holy Mysteries we are granted our eternal and unfailing salvation as a viaticum to eternal life, as an acceptable answer at His dread judgment and a precious substitute beyond our comprehension for that fruit of the tree of life of which the enemy of mankind, Lucifer, who fell from heaven, would have liked to deprive the human race. Though the enemy and devil seduced Eve, and Adam fell with her, yet the Lord not only granted them a Redeemer in the fruit of the seed of the woman Who trampled down death by death, but also granted us all in the woman, the Ever-Virgin Mary Mother of God, who crushes the head of the serpent in herself and in all the human race, a constant

mediatress with her Son and our God, and an invincible and persistent intercessor even for the most desperate sinners. That is why the Mother of God is called the "Plague of Demons," for it is not possible for a devil to destroy a man so long as man himself has recourse to the help of the Mother of God.

Grace is Light

"And I must further explain, your Godliness, the difference between the operations of the Holy Spirit Who dwells mystically in the hearts of those who believe in our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ and the operations of the darkness of sin which at the suggestion and instigation of the devil, acts predatorily in us. The Spirit of God reminds us of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and always acts triumphantly with Him, gladdening our hearts and guiding our steps into the way of peace, while the false, diabolical spirit reasons in the opposite way to Christ, and its actions in us are rebellious, stubborn, and full of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

And whoever lives and believes in Me will never die (John 11:26). He who has the grace of the Holy Spirit in reward for right faith in Christ, even if on account of human frailty his soul were to die for some sin or other, yet he will not die for ever, but he will be raised by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *Who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29), and freely gives grace upon grace. Of this grace, which was manifested to the whole world and to our human race by the God-man, it is said in the Gospel: *In Him was life, and the life was the light of men* (John 1:4); and further: *And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness has never swallowed it* (John 1:5). This means that the grace of the Holy Spirit which is granted at baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in spite of man's fall into sin, in spite of the darkness surrounding our soul, nevertheless shines in our hearts with the divine light (which has existed from time immemorial) of the inestimable merits of Christ. In the event of a sinner's impenitence this light of Christ cries to the Father: 'Abba, Father! Be not angry with this impenitence to the end (of his life).' Then, at the sinners conversion to the way of repentance, it effaces completely all trace of past sin and clothes the former sinner once more in a robe of incorruption spun from the grace of the Holy Spirit. The acquisition of this is the aim of the Christian life, which I have been explaining to your Godliness.

"I will tell you something else, so that you may understand more clearly what is meant by the grace of God, how to recognize it and how its action is manifested particularly in those who are enlightened by it. The grace of the Holy Spirit is the light which enlightens man. The whole of Sacred Scripture speaks about this. Thus our Holy Father David said: *Thy law is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths* (Ps. 118[119]:105), and *Unless Thy law had been my meditation, I should have died in my humiliation* (Ps. 118[119]:92). In other words, the grace of the Holy Spirit which is expressed in the Law, by the words of the Lord's commandments, is my lamp and light. If this

grace of the Holy Spirit (which I try to acquire so carefully and zealously that I meditate on Thy just judgments seven times a day) did not enlighten me amidst the darkness of the cares which are inseparable from the high calling of my royal rank, whence should I get a spark of light to illumine my way on the path of life, which is darkened by the ill-will of my enemies?

"In fact the Lord has frequently demonstrated before many witnesses how the grace of the Holy Spirit acts on people whom He has sanctified and illumined by His great inspirations. Remember Moses after his talk with God on Mount Sinai. He so shone with an extraordinary light that people were unable to look at him. He was even forced to wear a veil when he appeared in public. Remember the Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor. A great light encircled Him, *and His raiment became shining, exceedingly white like snow* (Mk. 9:3), and His disciples fell on their faces from fear. But when Moses and Elijah appeared to Him in that light, a cloud overshadowed them in order to hide the radiance of the light of the divine grace which blinded the eyes of the disciples. Thus the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God appears in an ineffable light to all to whom God reveals its action."

The Theosis Experience: Shining with the Light of Tabor

"But how," I asked Father Seraphim, "can I know that I am in the grace of the Holy Spirit?"

"It is very simple, your Godliness," he replied. "That is why the Lord says: *All things are simple to those who find knowledge* (Prov. 8:9). The trouble is that we do not seek this divine knowledge which does not puff up, for it is not of this world. This knowledge which is full of love for God and for our neighbor builds up every man for his salvation. Of this knowledge the Lord said that God *wills all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth* (I Tim. 2:4). And of the lack of this knowledge He said to His Apostles: *Are you also yet without understanding* (Mat. 15:16)? Concerning this understanding [15], it is said in the Gospel of the Apostles: *Then opened He their understanding* (Lk. 24:45), and the Apostles always perceived whether the Spirit of God was dwelling in them or not; and being filled with understanding, they saw the presence of the Holy Spirit with them and declared positively that their work was holy and entirely pleasing to the Lord God. That explains why in their Epistles they wrote: *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us* (Acts 15:28). Only on these grounds did they offer their Epistles as immutable truth for the benefit of all the faithful. Thus the holy Apostles were consciously aware of the presence in themselves of the Spirit of God. And so you see, your Godliness, how simple it is!"

"Nevertheless," I replied, "I do not understand how I can be certain that I am in the Spirit of God. How can I discern for myself His true manifestation in me?"

Father Seraphim replied: "I have already told you, your Godliness, that it is very simple and I have related in detail how people come to be in the Spirit of God and how we can recognize His presence in us. So what do you want, my son?"

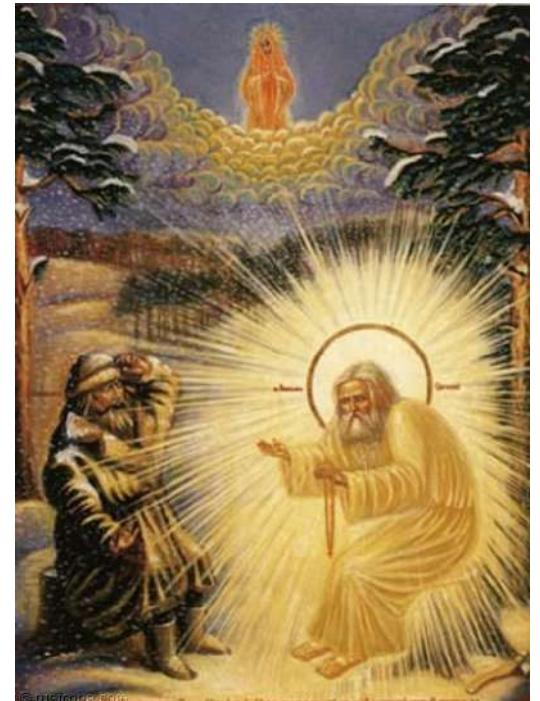
"I want to understand it well," I said.

Then Father Seraphim took me very firmly by the shoulders and said: "We are both in the Spirit of God now, my son. Why don't you look at me?"

I replied: "I cannot look, Father, because your eyes are flashing like lightning. Your face has become brighter than the sun, and my eyes ache with pain."

Father Seraphim said: "Don't be alarmed, your Godliness! Now you yourself have become as bright as I am. You are now in the fullness of the Spirit of God yourself; otherwise you would not be able to see me as I am."

Then, bending his head towards me, he whispered softly in my ear: "Thank the Lord God for His unutterable mercy to us! You saw that I did not even cross myself; and only in my heart I prayed mentally to the Lord God and said within myself: 'Lord, grant him to see clearly with his bodily eyes that descent of Thy Spirit which Thou grantest to Thy servants when Thou art pleased to appear in the light of Thy magnificent glory.' And you see, my son, the Lord instantly fulfilled the humble prayer of poor Seraphim. How then shall we not thank Him for this unspeakable gift to us both? Even to the greatest hermits, my son, the Lord God does not always show His mercy in this way. This grace of God, like a loving mother, has been pleased to comfort your contrite heart at the intercession of the Mother of God herself. But why, my son, do you not look me in the eyes? Just look, and don't be afraid! The Lord is with us!"



After these words I glanced at his face and there came over me an even greater reverent awe. Imagine in the center of the sun, in the dazzling light of its midday rays, the face of a man talking to you. You see the movement of his lips and the changing expression of his eyes, you hear his voice, you feel someone holding your shoulders; yet you do not see his hands, you do not even see yourself or his figure, but only a blinding light spreading far around for several yards

and illumining with its glaring sheen both the snow-blanket which covered the forest glade and the snow-flakes which besprinkled me and the great Elder. You can imagine the state I was in!

"How do you feel now?" Father Seraphim asked me.

"Extraordinarily well," I said.

"But in what way? How exactly do you feel well?"

I answered: "I feel such calmness and peace in my soul that no words can express it."

"This, your Godliness," said Father Seraphim, "is that peace of which the Lord said to His disciples: *My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you* (Jn. 14:21). *If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you* (Jn. 15:19). *But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world* (Jn. 16:33). And to those people whom this world hates but who are chosen by the Lord, the Lord gives that peace which you now feel within you, the peace which, in the words of the Apostle, *passes all understanding* (Phil. 4:7). The Apostle describes it in this way, because it is impossible to express in words the spiritual well-being which it produces in those into whose hearts the Lord God has infused it. Christ the Saviour calls it a peace which comes from His own generosity and is not of this world, for no temporary earthly prosperity can give it to the human heart; it is granted from on high by the Lord God Himself, and that is why it is called the peace of God. What else do you feel?" Father Seraphim asked me.

"An extraordinary sweetness," I replied.

And he continued: "This is that sweetness of which it is said in Holy Scripture: *They will be inebriated with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of Thy delight* (Ps. 35:8) [16]. And now this sweetness is flooding our hearts and coursing through our veins with unutterable delight. From this sweetness our hearts melt as it were, and both of us are filled with such happiness as tongue cannot tell. What else do you feel?"

"An extraordinary joy in all my heart."

And Father Seraphim continued: "When the Spirit of God comes down to man and overshadows him with the fullness of His inspiration, then the human soul overflows with unspeakable joy, for the Spirit of God fills with joy whatever He touches. This is that joy of which the Lord speaks in His Gospel: *A woman when she is in travail has sorrow, because her hour is come; but when she is delivered of the child, she remembers no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. In*

the world you will be sorrowful [18]; but when I see you again, your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you (Jn. 16:21-22). Yet however comforting may be this joy which you now feel in your heart, it is nothing in comparison with that of which the Lord Himself by the mouth of His Apostle said that that joy *eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for them that love Him* (I Cor. 2:9). Foretastes of that joy are given to us now, and if they fill our souls with such sweetness, well-being and happiness, what shall we say of that joy which has been prepared in heaven for those who weep here on earth? And you, my son, have wept enough in your life on earth; yet see with what joy the Lord consoles you even in this life! Now it is up to us, my son, to add labours to labours in order to *go from strength to strength* (Ps. 83:7), and to *come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Eph. 4:13), so that the words of the Lord may be fulfilled in us: *But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall grow wings like eagles; and they shall run and not be weary* (Is. 40:31); *they will go from strength to strength, and the God of gods will appear to them in the Sion* (Ps. 83:8) of realization and heavenly visions. Only then will our present joy (which now visits us little and briefly) appear in all its fullness, and no one will take it from us, for we shall be filled to overflowing with inexplicable heavenly delights. What else do you feel, your Godliness?"

I answered: "An extraordinary warmth."

"How can you feel warmth, my son? Look, we are sitting in the forest. It is winter out-of-doors, and snow is underfoot. There is more than an inch of snow on us, and the snowflakes are still falling. What warmth can there be?"

I answered: "Such as there is in a bath-house when the water is poured on the stone and the steam rises in clouds."

"And the smell?" he asked me. "Is it the same as in the bathhouse?"

"No," I replied. "There is nothing on earth like this fragrance. When in my dear mother's lifetime I was fond of dancing and used to go to balls and parties, my mother would sprinkle me with scent which she bought at the best shops in Kazan. But those scents did not exhale such fragrance."

And Father Seraphim, smiling pleasantly, said: "I know it myself just as well as you do, my son, but I am asking you on purpose to see whether you feel it in the same way. It is absolutely true, your Godliness! The sweetest earthly fragrance cannot be compared with the fragrance which we now feel, for we are now enveloped in the fragrance of the Holy Spirit of God. What on earth can be like it? Mark, your Godliness, you have told me that around us it is warm as in a

bath-house; but look, neither on you nor on me does the snow melt, nor does it underfoot; therefore, this warmth is not in the air but in us. It is that very warmth about which the Holy Spirit in the words of prayer makes us cry to the Lord: 'Warm me with the warmth of Thy Holy Spirit!' By it the hermits of both sexes were kept warm and did not fear the winter frost, being clad, as in fur coats, in the grace-given clothing woven by the Holy Spirit. And so it must be in actual fact, for the grace of God must dwell within us, in our heart, because the Lord said: *The Kingdom of God is within you* (Lk. 17:21). By the Kingdom of God the Lord meant the grace of the Holy Spirit. This Kingdom of God is now within us, and the grace of the Holy Spirit shines upon us and warms us from without as well. It fills the surrounding air with many fragrant odours, sweetens our senses with heavenly delight and floods our hearts with unutterable joy. Our present state is that of which the Apostle says; *The Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (Rom. 14:17). Our faith consists not in the plausible words of earthly wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and power (cp. I Cor.2:4). That is just the state that we are in now. Of this state the Lord said: *There are some of those standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Kingdom of God come in power* (Mk. 9:1). See, my son, what unspeakable joy the Lord God has now granted us! This is what it means to be in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, about which St. Macarius of Egypt writes: 'I myself was in the fullness of the Holy Spirit.' With this fullness of His Holy Spirit the Lord has now filled us poor creatures to overflowing. So there is no need now, your Godliness, to ask how people come to be in the grace of the Holy Spirit. Will you remember this manifestation of God's ineffable mercy which has visited us?"

"I don't know, Father," I said, "whether the Lord will grant me to remember this mercy of God always as vividly and clearly as I feel it now."

"I think," Father Seraphim answered me, "that the Lord will help you to retain it in your memory forever, or His goodness would never have instantly bowed in this way to my humble prayer and so quickly anticipated the request of poor Seraphim; all the more so, because it is not given to you alone to understand it, but through you it is for the whole world, in order that you yourself may be confirmed in God's work and may be useful to others. The fact that I am a Monk and you are a layman is utterly beside the point. What God requires is true faith in Himself and His Only-begotten Son. In return for that the grace of the Holy Spirit is granted abundantly from on high. The Lord seeks a heart filled to overflowing with love for God and our neighbor; this is the throne on which He loves to sit and on which He appears in the fullness of His heavenly glory. 'Son, give Me thy heart,' He says, 'and all the rest I Myself will add to thee' (Prov. 23:26; Matt. 6:33),' for in the human heart the Kingdom of God can be contained. The Lord commanded His disciples: *Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things* (Mat. 6:32,33). The Lord

does not rebuke us for using earthly goods, for He says Himself that, owing to the conditions of our earthly life, we need all these things; that is, all the things which make our human life more peaceful and make our way to our heavenly home lighter and easier. That is why the holy Apostle Paul said that in his opinion there was nothing better on earth than piety and sufficiency (cp. II Cor.9:8; I Tim.6:6). And Holy Church prays that this may be granted us by the Lord God; and though troubles, misfortunes and various needs are inseparable from our life on earth, yet the Lord God neither willed nor wills that we should have nothing but troubles and adversities. Therefore, He commands us through the Apostles to *bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ* (Gal. 6:2). The Lord Jesus personally gives us the commandment to love one another, so that, by consoling one another with mutual love, we may lighten the sorrowful and narrow way of our journey to the heavenly country. Why did He descend to us from heaven, if not for the purpose of taking upon Himself our poverty and of making us rich with the riches of His goodness and His unutterable generosity? He did not come to be served by men but to serve them Himself and to give His life for the salvation of many. You do the same, your Godliness, and having seen the mercy of God manifestly shown to you, tell of it to all who desire salvation. The *harvest truly is great, says the Lord, but the labourers are few* (Lk. 10:2). The Lord God has led us out to work and has given us the gifts of His grace in order that, by reaping the ears of the salvation of our fellow-men and bringing as many as possible into the Kingdom of God, we may bring Him fruit—some thirty fold, some sixty fold and some a hundredfold. Let us be watchful, my son, in order that we may not be condemned with that wicked and slothful servant who hid his talent in the earth, but let us try to imitate those good and faithful servants of the Lord who brought their Master four talents instead of two, and ten instead of five (Cf. Mat. 25:14-30).

"Of the mercy of the Lord God there is no shadow of doubt. You have seen for yourself, your Godliness, how the words of the Lord spoken through the Prophet have been accomplished in us: I am not a God far off, but a God near at hand (cp. Jer. 23:23), and thy salvation is at thy mouth (cp. Deut. 30:12-14; Rom. 10:8-13). I had not time even to cross myself, but only wished in my heart that the Lord would grant you to see His goodness in all its fullness, and He was pleased to hasten to realise my wish. I am not boasting when I say this, neither do I say it to show you my importance and lead you to jealousy, or to make you think that I am a Monk and you only a layman. No, no, your Godliness! *The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him in truth* (Ps. 144:18) *and there is no partiality with Him* (Eph. 6:9). For the Father loves the Son and gives everything into His hand (cp. Jn. 3:35). If only we ourselves loved Him, our heavenly Father, in a truly filial way! The Lord listens equally to the Monk and the simple Christian layman provided that both are Orthodox believers, and both love God from the depth of their souls, and both have faith in Him, if only as a grain of mustard seed; and they both shall move mountains. 'One shall move thousands and two tens of thousands' (cp. Deut. 32:30). The Lord Himself says: *All things are possible to him who believes* (Mk. 9:23). And the holy Apostle Paul loudly exclaims: I can do

all things in Christ Who strengthens me (Phil. 4:13). But does not our Lord Jesus Christ speak even more wonderfully than this of those who believe in Him: *He who believes in Me, not only the works that I do, but even greater than these shall he do, because I am going to My Father. And I will pray for you that your joy may be full. Hitherto you have asked nothing in My name. But now ask...* (Jn. 14:12,16; 16:24).

"Thus, my son, whatever you ask of the Lord God you will receive, if only it is for the glory of God or for the good of your neighbour, because what we do for the good of our neighbour He refers to His own glory. And therefore He says: "All that you have done unto one of the least of these, you have done unto Me" (cp. Matt. 25:40). And so, have no doubt that the Lord God will fulfill your petitions, if only they concern the glory of God or the benefit and edification of your fellow men. But, even if something is necessary for your own need or use or advantage, just as quickly and graciously will the Lord be pleased to send you even that, provided that extreme need and necessity require it. For the Lord loves those who love Him. The Lord is good to all men; He gives abundantly to those who call upon His Name, and His bounty is in all His works. He will do the will of them that fear Him and He will hear their prayer, and fulfill all their plans. The Lord will fulfill all thy petitions (cp. Ps. 144:19; 19:4,5). Only beware, your Godliness, of asking the Lord for something for which there is no urgent need. The Lord will not refuse you even this in return for your Orthodox faith in Christ the Saviour, for the Lord will not give up the staff of the righteous to the lot of sinners (cf. Ps. 124:3), and He will speedily accomplish the will of His servant David; but He will call him to account for having troubled Him without special need, and for having asked Him for something without which he could have managed very easily.

"And so, your Godliness, I have now told you and given you a practical demonstration of all that the Lord and the Mother of God have been pleased to tell you and show you through me, poor Seraphim. Now go in peace. The Lord and the Mother of God be with you always, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen. Now go in peace."

And during the whole of this time, from the moment when Father Seraphim's face became radiant, this illumination continued; and all that he told me from the beginning of the narrative till now, he said while remaining in one and the same position. The ineffable glow of the light which emanated from him I myself saw with my own eyes. And I am ready to vouch for it with an oath.

Troparion of St. Seraphim of Sarov

You loved Christ from your youth, O blessed one, and longing to work for Him alone you struggled in the wilderness in constant prayer and labor. With penitent heart and great love for Christ you were favored by the Mother of God. Therefore we cry to you: "Save us by your prayers, venerable Seraphim, our father."

WEEK 2: BECOMING HUMAN



Observation or Question # 1 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 2 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 3 from Online Class:

HANDOUT: WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE CHURCH
ARTICLE BY PHYLLIS M. ONEST, M. DIV

Is there a role for women in the Church? Is the ordained priesthood “the” role for those seeking to serve Christ? Can one do anything else that is as valuable as leading the faithful in worship? Given the debate and rhetoric in some Christian circles, the responses would be: maybe, yes, no. As one who has grown up in the Orthodox Church, and has an Orthodox theological education, it seems to me that the responses should be: yes, no, yes. Women are called to serve in every area of Church ministry, with the exception of the ordained priesthood. This is limited, for specific reasons, to a small percentage of men.

If we focus on what we cannot have, it's the “Eve Story” all over again: “You can fulfill everything but this one role.” We can choose to dwell on this one role, as some Christian women do and thereby distort God's plan, or we can be like the “new Eve,” the Theotokos, and seek to fulfill the role(s) that God offers us.

There is order in the creation. If we have learned nothing else from the Scriptures than this, then we will understand that seeking to live within the order makes for a fulfilled and meaningful life. Seeking to create our own order leads us away from God and all that is good. Given this premise, let us begin with the actions of our Lord, Jesus Christ.



Women In The New Testament

In the New Testament Jesus broke the centuries-old barrier that existed between men and women. Although rabbis did not include women in their group of followers, nor offer women spiritual teaching, Jesus visited and taught His friends Mary and Martha, who were also among His disciples. And there were other women among His followers.

St. Paul saw women as loyal coworkers. He depended on them to help spread the gospel. He spoke of consecrated virgins and widows. He wrote that in Christ there is neither Greek [Gentile] nor Jew, slave nor free, male nor female; all are one in Christ.

Phoebe was one of the first to be called deaconess. St. Paul wrote that she was “a helper of many and myself as well.” The role of the deaconess in later years was to help clergy with the administration of baptism to adult women, and to reach out to women in institutions where men were not allowed [prisons,

hospices for women, etc.] or where some of the faithful could be scandalized by the presence of men [e.g. bedrooms, isolated homes of the sick or elderly women].

Women Throughout Christian History

Deaconesses survived until the eleventh century, and with some rare examples, even into the 20th century. A prayer in the *Apostolic Constitutions* says: "honor the deacon as the image of Christ and the deaconess as the image of the Holy Spirit." Like these two persons of the Holy Trinity, the ordinations of deacons and deaconesses were for two different but equal persons. Different and equal, that is to say, each to fulfill a specific role in the Church, yet equal in the eyes of God.

Women have become saints and have mothered saints. St. Theodota (3rd c.) was the mother of SS Cosmas & Damian; St. Nonna (4th c.) of St. Gregory the Theologian; St. Emilia (4th c.) of St. Basil, St. Macrina, St. Peter of Sebaste, and St. Gregory of Nyssa.

Some have been influential grandmothers: St. Leonilla (2nd c.) brought her 3 grandsons to Christ. St. Olga was the pious grandmother of Prince Vladimir of Rus, who had his nation baptized in the 10th century. Many women have been martyred for their



faith. Among them were St. Katherine the Great Martyr, St. Irene the Great Martyr, St. Marcella. The list is endless.

Women have been great teachers. St. Melania (4th c.) taught against the heretic Nestorius. St. Theodora the Empress (9th c.) was instrumental in the return of the icons into Orthodox worship. St. Pulcheria (5th c.), along with her husband, the Emperor Marcian, convoked the 3rd and 4th Ecumenical Councils. St. Nina the Illuminator, "Equal to the Apostles," was a missionary, converting the country of Georgia in the early 4th century. St. Mary Magdalene and St. Helena are also identified as "Equal to the Apostles."

Women have entered the monastic life and offered spiritual direction. St. Xenia (4th c.), a deaconess, was not only the spiritual mother to her monastery, but also to people in the neighboring community. Today we have women monastics who do the same thing here in the United States.

Women In Modern Times

During the Communist years in **Russia**, the lay people were responsible for preserving the Church's presence. It was the women, the "babas"/ grandmothers, who kept the faith alive, who secretly taught the children and grandchildren and had them baptized. The young women of pre-revolutionary Russia, who later became the "babas," had godly nuns as their examples. Not only the nuns, but the older laywomen as well, provided a living image of holiness for younger women to follow. God thus prepared them for the sacred task that would be given them. I have read that Stalin knew he could not kill the soul of the Orthodox Church in Russia without exterminating every pious old woman in the land, and even Stalin knew he couldn't get away with that!

Russia is not the only land graced with the presence of saintly and righteous women. There are stories of the women of Greece, Lebanon, Syria, Romania, Serbia, Egypt and other countries where Orthodox Christians have had

to suffer for their faith. All these stories together make up the **history of Christian women**. Today, in **Greece** women are devout teachers of religion. Today, in **Romania** there are nuns, including many who have recently embraced the Orthodox faith, who are learned and now influence the Church. They offer ministry by serving the people who come for holy days to spend time with the nuns and seek a spiritual life.

Today, in the **United States**

women graduates of seminaries are involved in ecumenical dialogues, teaching in colleges and seminaries, writing, Christian education, music, as theological librarians, in healing ministries, monastic life, iconography, missions, charitable work, and more. There are opportunities for women in nearly every area of ministry: missions, education, healing, administration, evangelism, social services, supporting other women especially young mothers, monasticism, liturgically as readers, chanters, choir directors and choir members, and finally as wives, mothers, and godmothers. All are seeking to live out their faith as best they can!



An Orthodox Understanding Of The Roles Of Men And Women

Orthodox Christianity affirms that men and women are created equally in the image and likeness of the trinitarian God. Both Adam and Eve participated in “the Fall of mankind.” Both have been redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ, the “new Adam,” and the Theotokos, the “new Eve.” Both are called to *theosis*, to deification, that is, to become united with God. And yet total and unequivocal equality does not imply absolute sameness. Femaleness and maleness are part of the varying “charismata” or gifts given by the Holy Spirit to every person.

For Orthodox Christians the ordained priest is the “icon of Christ” or “in persona Christi.” We believe that there is something in the very nature of the male ordained priest which allows him “to be the sacramental presence of the Lord, the mystical embodiment of the Church’s husband and Lord.” Metropolitan Maximos, my former professor and mentor, taught that the priest is the “iconic representation of Christ, the Groom of the Bride, [which is] the Church. The priest is the living icon of the bridegroom.” Ordaining women to the priesthood alters that imagery to that of Bride of the Bride, which we cannot have.

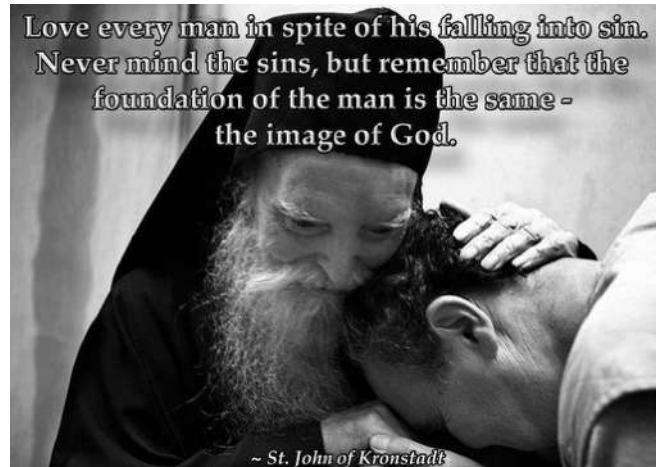
We, as Orthodox, affirm that manhood and womanhood are not interchangeable. Each member of the Body is equally called to live the Christian life as fully as possible. Each has his/her role. It’s all right to have different roles; it does not alter our value in God’s eyes, for no one is unimportant.

Throughout history the Orthodox Church suffered under various persecutors, most notably, the Ottoman Empire and the communists. As a result of these historic situations, the involvement of the laity was minimized. Only in this century has the situation begun to turn around. There is ministry to be done by all since we are all part of the “royal priesthood” [1 Pet 2:9]. The ordained ministry is but one area, and is not a “right,” but a specific calling to certain men, not all men.

THE ANGEL CAME TO THE MYRRHBEARING WOMEN AT THE
TOMB AND SAID: “MYRRH IS MEET FOR THE DEAD; BUT
CHRIST HAS SHOWN HIMSELF A STRANGER TO CORRUPTION!”
SO PROCLAIM: THE LORD IS RISEN, GRANTING THE WORLD
GREAT MERCY!

-TROPARION FOR THE MYRRH BEARING WOMEN

WEEK 3: THE MYSTERY OF SIN AND THE FALL



Observation or Question # 1 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 2 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 3 from Online Class:

A MODERN "SECULAR" VIEW ON FASTING?

Isn't it incredible how modern day science is just now starting to see the benefits of fasting...something that the fathers of the church have known and taught for centuries?!?

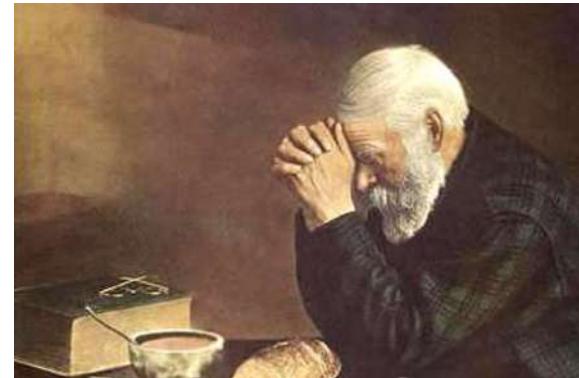
Taken from the Article: "Silicon Valley Execs who Don't Eat for Days"

Techies are pushing the trend of intermittent fasting for weight loss – made popular by diets like the 5:2 plan – to the extreme. Are they crazy?

The last time any food passed Phil Libin's lips was a day ago, when he ate yakitori at a restaurant in San Francisco's Mission district. He'll next eat in three days time on Thursday evening, when he has a reservation at one of the fanciest sushi restaurants in town. In the intervening four days it's just water, coffee and black tea.

Over the last eight months the former CEO of Evernote and current CEO of AI studio All Turtles has shunned food for stretches of between two and eight days, interspersed with similar periods of eating. He's lost almost 90 lbs and describes getting into fasting as "transformative".

"There's a mild euphoria. I'm in a much better mood, my focus is better, and there's a constant supply of energy. I just feel a lot healthier. It's helping me be a better CEO," he said over a cup of black coffee – one of many that day – at All Turtles' Soma office. *"Getting into fasting is definitely one of the top two or three most important things I've done in my life."*



Libin is one of a growing number of Silicon Valley types experimenting with extended periods of fasting, claiming benefits including weight loss, fewer mood swings and improved productivity.

Intermittent fasting gained popularity with the 5:2 diet, where people eat normally for five days a week and eat a dramatically reduced number of calories (around 500) on the remaining two days. However, Libin and others like him are pushing that idea further and with a focus on performance over weight loss.

Proponents combine fasting with obsessive tracking of vitals including body composition, blood glucose and ketones – compounds produced when the body raids its own fat stores, rather than relying on ingested carbohydrates, for energy.

This, they insist, is not dieting. It's "biohacking".

Geoffrey Woo, CEO of biohacking and nootropics company HVMN (pronounced "human"), led a seven-day fast at his company at the start of 2017, along with more than 100 members of WeFast, a community he founded dedicated to intermittent fasting.

Some participants wore continuous glucose monitors, usually worn by diabetics, to check blood glucose levels in realtime using pinprick probes inserted into the skin. They

also measured blood elevated ketones, to check that their body was indeed using fat as fuel, a metabolic state known as “ketosis”.

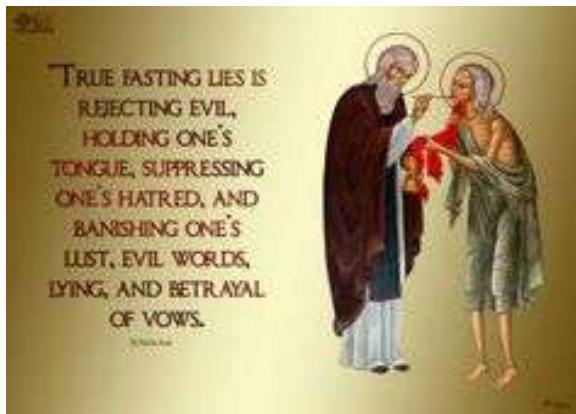
“Ketones are a super-fuel for the brain,” said Woo. “So a lot of the subjective benefits to fasting, including mental clarity, are down to the rise in ketones in the system.”

Woo and others in the company wanted to quantify the impact of fasting on productivity, so they combined the physiological tracking (of ketones and blood sugar) with a piece of software called Rescue Time that measures how productive individuals are at work.

“You would think that after seven days of not eating you would be totally distracted and hunting for food, but at around the two or three day mark hunger tapers off as ketone levels are elevating. You are feeding your brain and body with an alternative fuel source.”

At 5'11" and 165 lbs, Woo doesn't need to lose weight, although he did drop 12 lbs over the week. *“I'm focused on longevity and cognitive performance.”* Woo now does a weekly 36-hour fast and a quarterly three-day fast. It's given him a better grasp of his own sense of hunger.

“We conflate the need to eat with the need to socialize, walk around, take a break and mull on things,” he said.



There is a mounting body of scientific research exploring the effects of fasting on the body.

Each year dozens of papers are published showing how fasting can help boost the immune system, fight pre-diabetes and even, at least in mice, slow aging.

PERIODS OF FASTING IN THE ORTHODOX LITURGICAL YEAR

- 1.) EVERY WEDNESDAY TO REMEMBER THE BETRAYAL OF OUR LORD
- 2.) EVERY FRIDAY TO REMEMBER THE CRUCIFIXION OF OUR LORD
- 3.) THE ADVENT FAST (NOVEMBER 15TH TO DECEMBER 25TH)
- 4.) GREAT AND HOLY LENT (50 DAYS BEFORE HOLY PASCHA)
- 5.) THE APOSTLES FAST (IN THE EARLY SUMMER. DATES VARY DEPENDING ON WHEN THE DATE FOR PASCHA FALLS)
- 6.) THE DORMITION FAST (AUGUST 1ST TO THE 15TH)
- 7.) OTHER STRICT FAST DAYS AS SHOWN ON THE ORTHODOX LITURGICAL CALENDAR

WHEN IN DOUBT...LOOK IT UP!

WEEK 4: JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD



Observation or Question # 1 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 2 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 3 from Online Class:

“ON THE INCARNATION” DISCUSSION

In this section, we will be reading from St. Athanasius famous work: “On the Incarnation”. Read the “Question to ponder” before each of the sections, and answer them to the best of our ability!

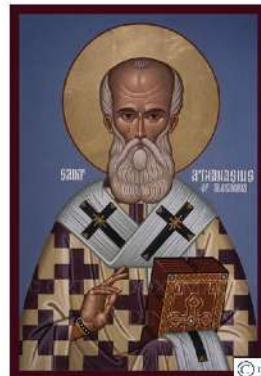
Question to ponder: “In what ways can we restore the Image of God within us?”

You may be wondering why we are discussing the origin of men when we set out to talk about the Word’s (Christ) becoming Man. The former subject is relevant to the latter for this reason: it was our sorry case that caused the Word to come down. It was our transgressions that called out His love for us, so that He made haste to help us and appear among us. It is we who were the cause of His taking human form, and for our salvation that in His great love, He was born both and manifested into a human body.

For God had made man thus (that is, as an embodied spirit), and had willed that he should remain in incorruption. But men, having turned from the contemplation of God to evil of their own devising, had come inevitably under the law of death. Instead of remaining in the state in which God had created them, they were in the process of becoming corrupted entirely, and death had them completely under its dominion.

Transgression of the commandment given to them (man) was making them turn back against their nature; and as they had at the beginning come into being out of nonexistence, so were they now on the way to returning, through corruption, to non-existence again.

By nature, of course, man is mortal, since he was made from nothing; but he bears also the Likeness of Him Who is, and if he preserves that Likeness through constant contemplation, then his nature is deprived of its power and he remains incorrupt. So it is affirmed in Wisdom: “The keeping of His laws is the assurance of incorruption.” (Wisdom of Solomon 6:18) And being incorrupt, he would be henceforth as God...as Holy Scripture says: “I have said Ye are gods and sons of the Highest of all you: But ye die as men and fall as one of the princes (Psalms 82: 6-7)



St. Athanasius
of Alexandria

He became what
we are so that He
might make us
what He is.

Question to Ponder: In what ways can we see the fall of man continuing in the world today?

This then, was the plight of men. God had not only made them out of nothing, but had also graciously bestowed on them His own life by the grace of the Word. Then, turning from eternal things to things corruptible, by counsel of the devil, they had become the cause of their own corruption in death; for as I said before, though they were by nature subject to corruption, the grace of their union with the Word made them capable of escaping from the natural law, provided that they retained the beauty of innocence with which they were created. That is to say, the presence of the Word with them shielded them even from natural corruption, as also Wisdom says: "God created man for incorruption and as an image of His own eternity; but by envy of the devil, death entered into the world." (Wisdom of Solomon 2:23)

When the fall occurred, men began to die, and corruption ran riot among them, and held sway over them to an even more than natural degree, because it was the penalty of which God had forewarned them for transgressing the commandment. Indeed, they had in their sinning surpassed all limits; for, having invented wickedness in the beginning and so involved themselves in death and corruption, they had gone on gradually from bad to worse, not stopping at any one kind of evil, but continually, as with insatiable appetite, devising new kinds of sins.

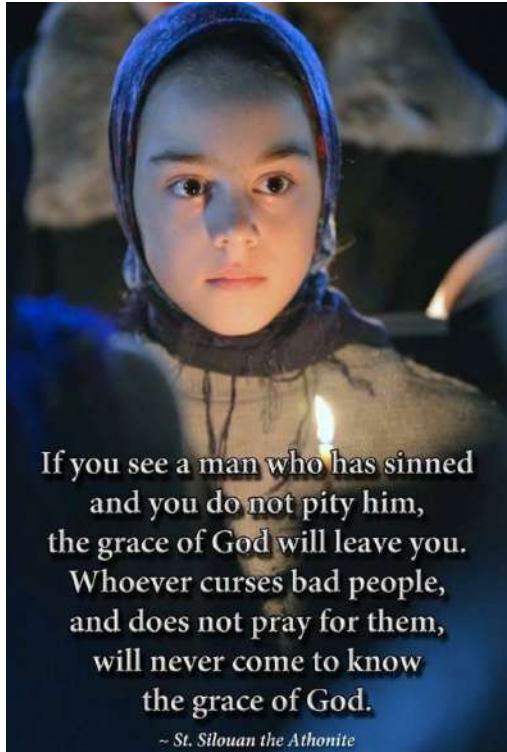


Adulteries and thefts were everywhere. Murder and rape filled the earth. Law was disregarded in corruption and injustice. All kinds of iniquities were perpetrated by all...both singly and in common. Cities were warring against cities. Nations were rising against nations, and the whole earth was rent with factions and battles, while each strove to outdo the other in wickedness. Even crimes contrary to nature were not unknown, but as the martyr-apostle of Christ says: Their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature, and the men also, leaving the natural use of the woman, flamed out in lust towards each other, perpetrating shameless acts with their own sex, and receiving in their own persons the due recompense of their pervertedness.

Question to Ponder: Why didn't God just let humanity continue to drown itself? What is the Divine Dilemma?

We saw in the last chapter that, because death and corruption were gaining even firmer hold on them, the human race was in the process of destruction. Man, who was created in God's image and in his possession of reason, reflected the very Word Himself, and was disappearing...the work of God was being undone. The law of death, which followed from "the fall", prevailed upon us and from it, there was no escape!

The thing that was happening was in truth both monstrous and unfitting. It would, of course, have been unthinkable that God should go back upon His word and that man, having transgressed, should not die; but it was equally monstrous that beings which once had shared the nature of the Word should perish and turn back again into non-existence through corruption.



It was unworthy of the goodness of God that creatures, made by Him, should be brought to nothing through the deceit wrought upon man by the devil. It was supremely unfitting that the work of God in mankind should disappear, either through their own negligence or through the deceit of evil spirits!

So, the creatures whom He had created reasonable, like the Word, were in fact perishing, and such noble works were on the road to ruin. What then was God, being good,

to do? Was He to let corruption and death have their way with them? In that case, what was the use of having made them in the beginning? Surely it would have been better never to have been created at all, than having been created and be neglectful and perish. Besides all of this, such an indifference to the ruin of His own work before His very eyes would argue not goodness in God, but limitation, and that far more than if He had never created men at all!

It was impossible, therefore, that God should leave man to be carried off by corruption, because it would be unfitting and unworthy of Himself.

Question to Ponder: Why didn't God simply demand that men repent?

Yet, as true as all of this is, it is not the whole matter. As we have already said, it was unthinkable that God, the Father of Truth, should go back on His word regarding death in order to ensure our continued existence. He could not falsify Himself; what then, was God to do? Was He to demand repentance from men for their transgression? You might say that that was worthy of God, and argue further that, as through the fall, they became subject to death, so through repentance, they might return to life again.

But, repentance would not guard the Divine consistence, for if death did not hold dominion over men, God would still remain untrue. Nor does repentance recall men from what is according to their nature; all that it does is to make them cease from sinning.

Had it been a case of a trespass only, and not a subsequent corruption, repentance would have been well enough. But when transgressions had begun, men came under the power of the corruption proper to their nature, and were bereft of the grace which belonged to them as creatures in the Image of God. No, repentance could not meet the case.



What, or rather Who was it that was needed for such grace and such recall as we required? Who, save for the Word of God Himself, Who also in the beginning had made things out of nothing? His part it was, and His alone, both to bring again the corruptible to incorruption, and to maintain for the Father His consistency of character with all. For He alone, being Word of the Father and above all, was in consequence both able to recreate all, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all, and to be an ambassador for all with the Father.

Question to Ponder: Why did God come in the world?

For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered into our world. In one sense, indeed He was not far from it before, for no part of creation had ever been without Him Who, while ever abiding in union with the Father, yet fills all things that are. But now, He entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in His love, and Self-revealing to us. He saw the reasonable race, the race of men that, like Himself, expressed the Father's mind, wasting out of existence...and death reigning over all in corruption.

The Word saw that corruption held us all the closer, because it was the penalty for the fall. He saw, too, how unthinkable it would have been for the law to be repealed before it was fulfilled. He saw how unseemly it was that the very things of which He Himself was the Artificer should be disappearing. He saw how the surpassing wickedness of men was mounting up against them. He saw also their universal liability to death.

All of these things He saw, and, pitying our race, moved with compassion for our limitation, unable to endure that death should have the mastery...but rather that His creatures should perish and the work of His Father for us men come to nought, He took Himself a body, a human body, even as our own.



*He did not merely become embodied or merely just appear to us. Had that been so, He could have revealed His divine Majesty in some other and better way. No. He took OUR body, and not only so, but He took it directly from a **spotless, stainless virgin**, without the agency of human father pure body, untainted by intercourse with man.*

He, the Mighty One, the Artificer of all, Himself prepared this body in the virgin as a temple for Himself, and took it for His very own, as the instrument through which He was down in which He dwelt. Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father. This He did out of sheer love for us, so that in His death, all might die, and the law of death thereby be abolished. Having fulfilled in His body that for which it was appointed, it was thereafter voided of its power for men...Thus He would make death to disappear from them as utterly as straw from fire.

WEEK 5: THE HOLY SPIRIT



Observation or Question # 1 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 2 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 3 from Online Class:

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER NOTES

The following is an excerpt from the book “Acquiring the Mind of Christ” by Abbot Archimandrite Sergius of St. Tikhon’s Monastery

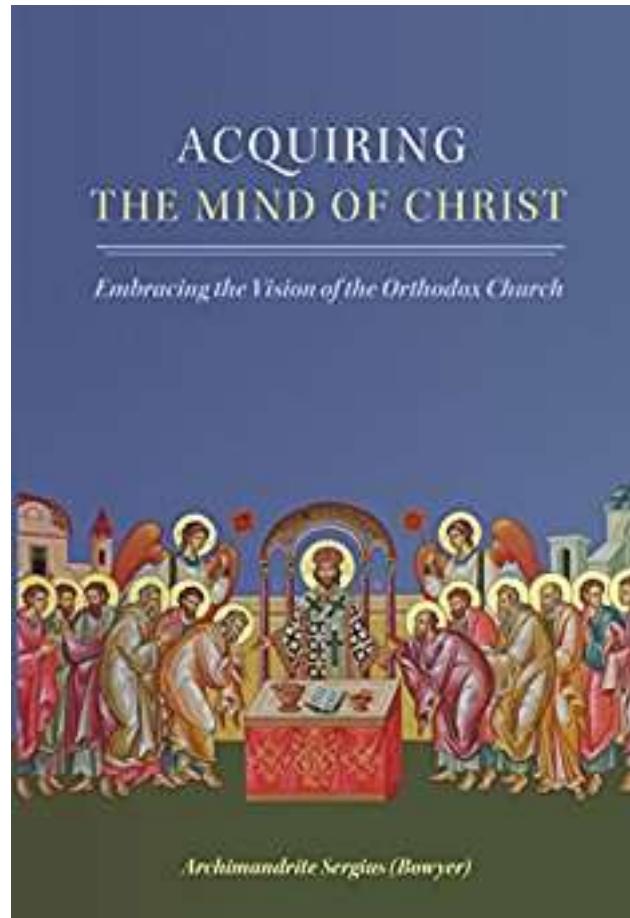
According to St. John Climacus, prayer is defined as “converse and union with God.” It is this personal conversation with God that effects union with Him, enabling us to fulfill our task of actualizing our salvation. If prayer is right, the Fathers say, then everything else will be right. Our task in this short earthly life is to resume the dialogue that was lost with God in Paradise; to learn how to orient the heart, tuning its antennae to the frequency of God’s life of grace. It is in this way we acquire eternal life and our salvation.

It is not the purpose of this short exhortation to explain all of the dynamics of inner prayer and the vicissitudes we will face. It is, however, our task to once again remind all that without prayer, whether personal or corporate, there is no salvation. It is imperative that all Christians everywhere, no matter their place or rank, must learn to pray with their heart, deeply committing to a life of prayer if they expect to know God and do His will.

Prayer generates prayer. The Holy Scriptures tells us that “God grants prayer to the one who prays.” Our task is to begin simply, entering into the dialogue with God and renouncing the monologue with our ego and passions.

If we wish to make progress in the area of prayer and be sensitized to spiritual things we must fulfill three basic tasks:

First, we must deeply committed to a certain amount of prayer at a certain time every day, without fail. we must fulfill this task, not just as a rule or an obligation, but out of concern for cultivating our relationship with God. This is our



salvation and joy. (Our time of prayer can be in the morning, and/or evening as the circumstances of our life permit.)

Second, as St. Theophan the Recluse says, we must always pray as if we have never prayed before. This means we always approach the mystery of God without expectation or illusion, without letting our past success or failure distract us from our present contact with the Lord. As God can only be found in the present, nostalgia can be harmful to prayer. In addition, imagination should never be used when praying as it can potentially be the conduit for demonic energy.

Third, we must always be willing to start again no matter how long it has been since we have prayed or what the outcome, good or bad, has been in the past. This also applies to our repentance so that no matter what we have done, seen, thought, or heard, we approach God for forgiveness, in search of our medicine. St. Paul reminds us: *“Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ (Phil.*

3:13-14), for “a broken and contrite O God, Thou wilt not despise” (Ps. 50:19)

THE BASIC CONDITION FOR THE PRAYER OF THE HEART IS THE BELIEF THAT IT IS NOT MERELY PRAYER, BUT RATHER TRUE COMMUNION WITH GOD. WITHOUT REAL PRAYER, THERE IS NO LIFE, AND WHEN WE TOUCH TRUE PRAYER, WE FIND IT TO BE ONE OF THE GREATEST MIRACLES OF ALL...

-ARCHIMANDRITE AIMILIANOS



away from your spiritual life. *“What I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”* (Mark 13:37)

The Apostle exhorts all Christians to *“pray without ceasing”* (1 Thes. 5:17). This task is great and is often one of the most difficult to pursue, precisely because prayer affords such great reward: peace, life, renewal, enlightenment, joy in the Holy Spirit, and ultimately our salvation. Our Lord asks each one of us: *“Could you not watch with me one hour?”* (Matt. 26:40). *“Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation”*. (Matt.26:41) and fall

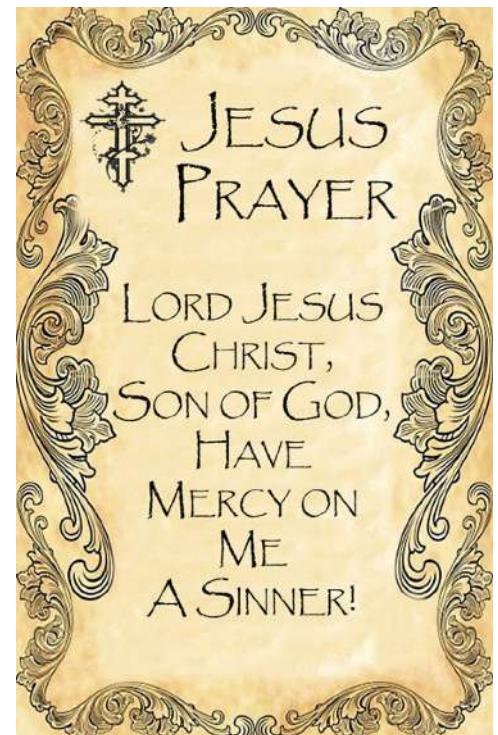
In this context of prayer, watchfulness is the key to our inner life. It allows for a health distance from our thoughts and potential release from our passions. The Jesus Prayer is essential in helping us to build up a sense of watchfulness in our heart and thoughts, enabling us to detach from them to some degree; for we are not our thoughts. St. Theophan tells us that the principal asceticism of the spiritual life is keeping our mind and heart from passionate movement and thought. The Jesus prayer, “*O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.*” is an essential tool for enabling us to overcome the deadly sinful movements of the mind and heart. This short prayer is a remedy and defense against every kind of darkness. St. Isaac the Syrian even says that the Name of Christ is Light. When we use this light against the onslaught of temptations, we dispel their darkness!

Elder Zacharias explains that the easiest way to become the Temple of the Holy Spirit is through the invocation of the Name of Jesus Christ. In this way, we open the heart to the grace of God. However, Elder Sophrony reminds us that it is essential to love the One we invoke. And how do we love Him? The Lord tells us, “*If you love me, keep my commandments.*” (John 14:15). Since these commandments exceed human measure, they can only be fulfilled with the power of prayer.

If we are to start the task of prayer, we must begin immediately. We should not be motivated by a lot of excitement or self-praise, thinking that we are owed something great for our spiritual effort. It is our privilege and joy to converse with our God, being the purpose for which we were created.

It is imperative that we see personal and corporate prayer as two sides of the same coin. Corporate liturgical prayer life in the Church feeds into and provides an invaluable and essential shape for our interior life. Corporate prayer life can become dead and frozen without the inner attention and fire which personal prayer gives us. Inner life, if not well-grounded in the liturgical life of the Church, can possibly lead us to delusion.

Today is the day of salvation, and we must never put off prayer for another time. Every moment is the moment to turn to the Lord, to thank the Lord for all his



innumerable benefits, to beseech aid from on high, to repent and ask forgiveness, and to have His blessing. The most essential part of prayer is the inner turning of the heart to the Lord.

The classic textbook definition of prayer given by St. Theophan the Recluse is *“standing with the mind in the heart before the Lord.”* It is imperative that, as we pray, our attention (our nous or “eye of the heart”) remains in our heart as much as possible. As the nous wanders, we simply bring it back to the heart and to the words of prayer.

Another essential key to this new life of prayer is learning to listen to God. God is always speaking to us, but we are often so busy monologuing with ourselves that we may not be able to hear Him. It is important that we not only approach prayer as union with God, but also with a receptive listening heart, waiting on the Lord like the Prophet Samuel: *“Yes, Lord, Thy servant is listening”* (1 King. 3:10) This means that we cultivate silence and watchfulness in our prayer time so that it is not just filled with our requests; we make room to hear from the Lord His requests from us. However, He won’t always speak to us in the manner in which we might expect. Sometimes it may be a verse from Scripture, a verse from the Fathers, a sense in our own heart of intuition or conscience, or just the peace of God. We must be open and ready for any way God chooses to reveal Himself, always willing to confirm the word with those who have a good witness in the Church (our priest, spiritual father, knowledgeable laymen; the point is to have a good reference outside ourselves). Monilogistic prayer, or literally “prayer of one thought (Jesus Prayer), helps us learn how to speak with and listen to God.

A Recommended Prayer Rule

This book includes a short prayer rule that can help us to make a beginning. It takes approximately 10 minutes, the minimum time for the heart to reorient itself to a better spiritual state. It by no means is a static rule, and we must continue to “press into the kingdom” more wholeheartedly each day. As we press into prayer in the long term, we need to extend our time with the Lord in an incremental way until we have the right amount of helpful spiritual tension.

This rule can be expanded and repeated. However, what is most important is that we understand from the beginning of that prayer is a matter of constancy and consistency, incrementally building our time with the Lord in a measured and regulated way. We do not want to pray merely so as to fulfill some

Here is the basic rule:

Trisagion Prayers
Psalm 50
The Creed
Five Prostrations (using the Jesus Prayer)
Five minutes of the Jesus Prayer
Morning/Evening prayer
A chapter from the Gospels
It is Truly Meet..."
The ending prayer: "Through the prayers..."

sense of religious obligation. We do not want to pray so that we feel better about ourselves! God Forbid! We want a living, life-giving relationship with our Creator and Lord Jesus Christ, to be sensitized to His voice and to true spiritual reality. This can only be achieved by humble, committed, and patient prayer. we must always remember that it is the content of the humble and contrite prayer of the publican that justifies us: "*God be merciful to me a sinner*" (Luke 18:13). Prayer is not just a matter of the actual words said, but more so of the right and contrite disposition of the heart when speaking with God.

St. Theoleptos of Philadelphia reminds us that we must never neglect prostrations. The body must be included in this dialogue with the Lord. Our prayer needs to come from our heart, both the spiritual and the bodily. Through prayer, we journey deeper into the body, concerned with its transfiguration, rather than escaping from it. The body is meant to become the Temple of the Holy Spirit. It is through profound prayer of tearful contrition to the



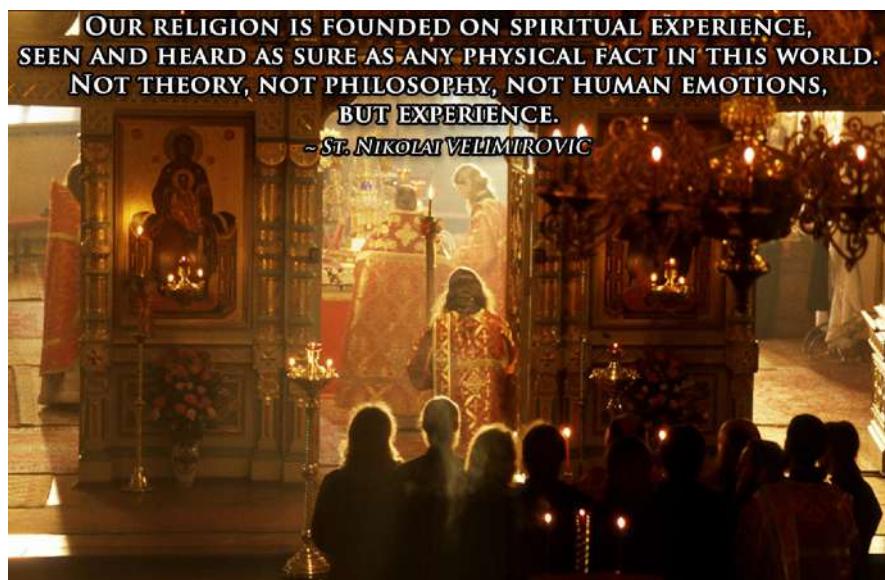
Lord that both the soul and body are sanctified. Therefore, we must never neglect prostrations as they help to bring the mind and body together before the Lord, creating a prayerful dialogue from our whole person.

In addition, reading the Gospel and spiritual reading is necessary during prayer. It is during this time that the heart can become still, lucid, and open to the grace and life which are hidden within the words themselves. Christ tells us that the words He gives to us *“are spirit, and they are life”* (John 6:63). If we are open and receptive, the Spirit of the Gospel can enter into us, profoundly altering our heart, sanctifying us. Further, not only will we change; through this prayerful encounter we have frequent opportunity for God to speak directly to us in a profound and real way.

This chapter’s exhortation to prayer is not a definitive guide, but rather a beginning for us who have not yet endeavored to begin this blessed and life-giving work. Prayer is the only bridge over the despondency of the world with its death, sins, and passions. It gives light to the mind, helping us to slowly see ourselves as we are, and God as He is. It enables us to overcome temptation and weakness. It has the potential to heal our spiritual infirmities. Persistent and patient prayer is the

answer to almost all the questions we have; this is so because it grants us God’s grace and peace. It also brings us to a saving knowledge of the true God, going above and beyond rational thought.

It cannot be stated enough that it is essential to begin again today. Prayer generates prayer. The Fathers tell us that prayer will teach us and be



our guide if we are devoted to it. It is the quintessential practice for all Christians. If we say we love God, we pray; if we say we love each other, we pray for each other. Our life of prayer fulfills the commandment on which hang all of the Law and the Prophets: to love God and love our neighbor. Prayer is simple, but it can be arduous. Prayer is fought against on all sides. It can be our guide and light in all things. Prayer in its highest form, St. Gregory of Sinai says, is God Himself. Let us begin again our conversation with God this very moment, thereby moving forward in our union and salvation in Christ our God.

WEEK 6: THE CHURCH, MARY, AND THE SAINTS



Observation or Question # 1 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 2 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 3 from Online Class:

DEFENDING THE FAITH EXERCISE

"O Virgin Mary Mother of God, please keep us safe as we travel to our dacha. Also, please make Ivan well soon". Valentina prayed standing before the icon and candle she had lit, then hurried to go out to the cathedral. ON the way, however, she saw the icon of St. Nicholas and decided to pray once more. This time, she simply bowed and asked the saint to give her family safe travel. She lingered a little in front of the icon, as though she had expected the image to respond. She wondered..."did all of these rituals make any difference? Did Mary and St. Nicholas even know she was there?"

Valentina wasn't sure. But she did know if something bad were to happen on the trip, or Ivan never got well, she could never forgive herself for not praying. Ira, one of her friends who had recently become a Baptist, had told her she could pray directly to Jesus...that praying to Saints wasn't necessary. Valentina didn't know who was right...but the Orthodox Way just seemed easier to her.

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND TO THESE "BARRIERS OF FAITH"?

Prayer should go to God Alone

The Orthodox Devotion and prayer to the saints creates a barrier for personal faith in Jesus, by deflecting to the saints worship and prayer that is due to God alone.

Icons and Relics have "spiritual power" in and of itself.

The concept that the grace of a saint acquired resides in an icon or spiritual relic gives the impression that they have spiritual powers.

Some of the most famous icons were the powerful "good luck charms" that enabled battles to be won and cities to be protected. Grace as the source of "good luck" and protection is a gross distortion that creates a barrier to personal faith in Jesus' saving grace. The idea of grace as an energy that can be received from the icon or relic is a misconception of grace. Orthodox people who perceived grace as a power or energy to acquire may be hindered from understanding the true nature of salvation.

Icons Replace Jesus as the Mediator

The use of icons of the saints they represent tend to replace Jesus as the mediator between God and man in the minds of Orthodox Christians. Since the saints seem more accessible and more human, some Orthodox people pray to the Saints more than to Jesus.

Questions for Discussion

- 1.) How does our understanding of The Church Triumphant and the Church Militant differ from your past Christian experience? Does understanding the differences help explain the Orthodox view of Saints and Icons?
- 2.) In the "guide" to converting Orthodox, it says that one way is to show that God accepts the believer and his/her prayers. Is our entire goal in this life to be accepted by God? How does this relate to the Ancient Christian understanding of restoring the image and likeness of God?

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT AND THE CHURCH MILITANT
THE MOTHER OF GOD
Metropolitan Kallistos Ware

In God and His Church there is no division between the living and departed, but all are one in the love of the Father. Whether we are alive or we have fallen asleep, as members of the Church, we still belong to the same family, and still have the duty to bear one another's burdens. Therefore just as Orthodox Christians here on earth pray for one another and ask for one another's prayers, so they pray also for the faithful departed and ask the faithful departed to pray for them. Death cannot sever the bond of mutual love which links the members of the Church together (for all are alive in Christ).

The Saints

St. Symeon the New Theologian describes the saints as the forming of a golden chain:

The Holy Trinity, pervading everyone from first to last, from head to foot, binds them all together... The saints in each generation, joined to those who have gone before, and filled like them with light, become a golden chain, in which each saint is a separate link, united to the next by faith, works, and love. So in the One God they form a single chain which cannot quickly be broken.

Such is the Orthodox idea of the communion of saints. This chain is a chain of mutual love and prayer; and in this loving prayer the members of the Church on earth, "called to be saint", have their place.

In private, an Orthodox Christian is free to ask for the prayers of any member of the Church, whether canonized or not. It would be perfectly normal for an Orthodox Child, if orphaned, to end his evening prayers by asking for the intercessions not only of the Mother of God and the saints, but of his own mother and father.



In its public worship, however, the Church usually asks the prayers only of those whom it has officially proclaimed as saints; but in exceptional circumstances, a public cult may become established without any formal act of canonization (Met. Leonty, Matushka Olga, etc.).

The Orthodox Church from Greece, under the Ottoman Empire, soon began to commemorate the New Martyrs in its worship; but to avoid the notice of the Turks, there was usually no official act of proclamation: The cult of the New Martyrs was in most cases something that arose spontaneously under popular initiative. The same thing happened under Communism with the New Martyrs of Russia: for a long time, they were honored in secret by believers in what was then the Soviet Union, but it was only after 1988 that it became possible for the Russian Church to openly proclaim them as saints.

Reverence of the saints is closely bound up with the veneration of icons. These are placed by Orthodox not only in their churches, but in each room of their homes, and even in cars and buses. These ever-present icons act as a point of meeting between the living members of the Church and those who have gone before. Icons help Orthodox to look on the saints not as remote and legendary figures from the past, but as contemporaries and personal friends.



The Mother of God

Among the saints, a special position belongs to the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom Orthodox reverence as the most exalted among God's creatures, "more honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious than the Seraphim". **Note that we have termed her "most exalted among God's creatures; Orthodox, like Roman Catholics, venerate or honor the Mother of God, but in no sense do the members of either Church regard her as a fourth person of the Holy Trinity, nor do they assign to her the worship that is due to God alone.** In Orthodox Theology, the distinction is very clearly marked; there is a special word in Greek "latreia", reserved for the worship of God, while the veneration of Mary uses an entirely different term "proskynesis".

In Orthodox services, Mary is often mentioned, and on each occasion she is usually given her full title: "Our All-Holy, immaculate, most blessed and glorified Lady, Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary." Here are included the three chief epithets applied to Our Lady by the Orthodox Church: Theotokos (God-bearer), Aei-parthenos (Ever-Virgin), and Panagia (All-Holy). The first of these titles was assigned to her by the 3rd Ecumenical Council in Ephesus (431 AD), the second by the 5th Ecumenical Council in

Constantinople (553), while the third “panagia”, although never a subject of dogmatic definition, is accepted and used by all Orthodox.

The appellation “Theotokos” is of particular importance, for it provides the key to the Orthodox Devotion to the Virgin. We honor Mary because she is the Mother of our God. We do not venerate her in isolation, but because of her relation to Christ. Thus the reverence is shown to Mary, so far from eclipsing the worship of God, has exactly the opposite effect: The more we esteem Mary, the more vivid is our awareness of the majesty of her Son, for it is precisely on account of the Son that we venerate the Mother.

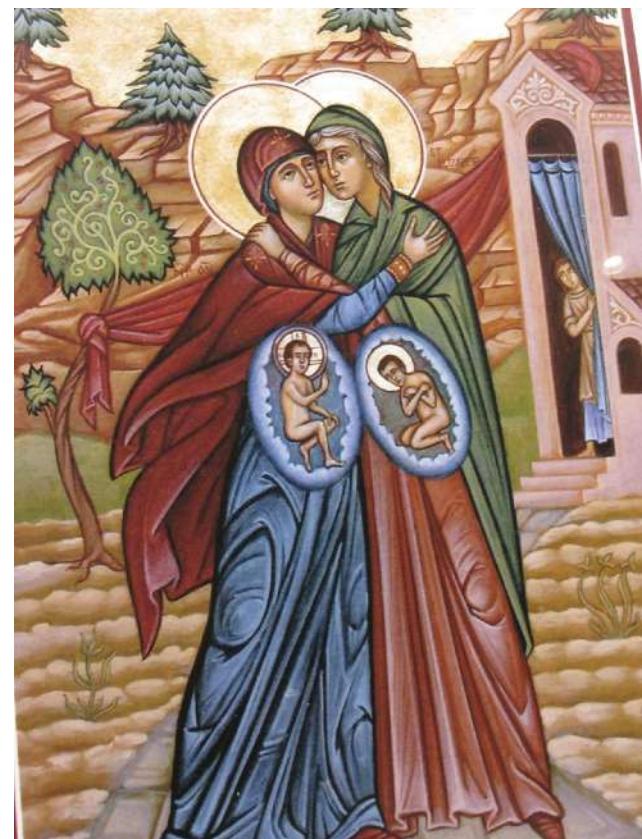
We honor the Mother on account of her Son: Mariology is simply an extension of Christology. The Fathers of the Council of

Ephesus insisted on calling her the Theotokos, not because they desired to glorify her as an end in herself, apart from her Son, but because only by honoring Mary could they safeguard a right doctrine of Christ’s person. Anyone who thinks out the implications of that great phrase, *The Word was made flesh*, cannot but feel a profound awe for her who was chosen as the instrument of so surpassing a mystery.

When people refuse to honor Mary, only too often it is because they really do not believe in the Incarnation.

But Orthodox honor Mary, not only because she is the Theotokos, but because she is the Panagia, All-Holy. Among all of God’s creatures, she is the supreme example of synergy or cooperation between the purpose of the deity and human freedom. God, who always respects our liberty of choice, did not wish to become incarnate without the willing consent of His Mother. He waited for her voluntary response; “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be as you have said”. Mary could have refused; she was not merely passive, but an active participant in the mystery.

In Christ is the New Adam, Mary is the New Eve, whose obedient submission to the will of God counterbalanced Eve’s disobedience in Paradise. “So the knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosed through the obedience of Mary; for what Eve, a virgin, bound by her unbelief, that Mary, a virgin, unloosed by her faith. “Death by Eve, life by Mary” (St. Jerome)



WEEK 7: HOLY BAPTISM AND CHRISMATION



Observation or Question # 1 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 2 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 3 from Online Class:

INFANT BAPTISM: WHAT THE CHURCH BELIEVES

EXCERPTS OF AN ARTICLE WRITTEN BY FR. JOHN HAINSWORTH

At the Dinner Table

Every night my family gathers around the dinner table. We pray, dish out the food, laugh, argue, and ask and answer questions. The scene is sometimes chaotic, sometimes serious, sometimes silly, but this scene defines our family. This table becomes the heart of our family. My girls, when they come to the table, come as full members of the family. They are not invited to the table but excluded from the food. They belong by right to the household, and therefore belong at the dinner table. This right is never questioned, their status never challenged. Do they understand the significance of belonging to the family? Do they appreciate the blessings inherent in membership? Of course not, at least not yet. Will they ever reject this family? Will they break the holy fellowship of that dinner table? Probably not, but even if I worry that they will, I cannot keep from them the family status which they have as a birthright.

On the contrary, honoring that status, rejoicing and raising them in it, will do more to preserve them as valuable family members than waiting to offer this membership until I am sure they truly appreciate it.

Why start at the dinner table to talk about the practice of baptizing children in the Orthodox Church? Because the family table, and the family itself, are biblically ideal images for the church altar and the church family. We are born into an earthly family, and born again (John 3:3) into the heavenly family. We eat together at the dinner table, and we feast together at the altar.



With God our Father, and the Church our Mother (Revelation 12:1), we gather as children of a holy family, each of us enjoying the full privileges of membership by a baptismal birthright. Do we fathom the many blessings we receive just by virtue of belonging to this family? No, for to do so would be to fathom the depths of the riches of God. Does God still honor us, treat us as His children, still welcome us to His table, still call us His own? Always and forever. We may reject Him, rebel against Him, flee to a far off country. But if we return, we do not return as stewards of His Household, we return as His children, we return as prodigal members of His family. If we do not return, we know that God will never stop His vigil at the gates of our hearts, waiting for the return of His own.

Nevertheless, the ancient, apostolic and biblical practice of baptizing infants and children has been challenged by some in recent times. Let us look at the background and arguments of this debate before we turn to what it means for the Orthodox Church to baptize children.

Some Historical Background

Infant baptism was not controversial in the Church during the first two centuries after Christ. St. Polycarp described himself as having been in devoted service to Christ for 86 years in a manner that would clearly indicate a childhood baptism. Pliny describes with amazement that children belong to the Christian cult in just the same way as do the adults. St. Justin Martyr tells of the “many men and women who have been disciples of Christ from childhood.” St. Irenaeus of Lyon wrote about “all who are born again in God, the infants, and the small children . . . and the mature.” St. Hippolytus insisted that “first you should baptize the little ones . . . but for those who cannot speak, their parents should speak or another who belongs to their family.”

Many of the greatest Fathers of the third and fourth centuries were not baptized until they were adults, despite having been born to Christian parents. Among them were St. Basil the Great, St. Augustine, and St. Jerome. The later baptism of these men reflects a larger crisis in the newly legalized Church under St. Constantine.

One reason postponing baptism became popular was the desire of some Christians to counteract the new wave of baptisms of pagans wishing only to belong to the faith of their emperor. While not yet a requirement of Roman loyalty or citizenship, baptism ensured that one was on the right side of Rome. Postponing baptism emphasized the significance of the rite, and was an attempt to preserve the genuineness of the life for which baptism served as the initiation.

Postponement had nothing to do with the validity of a child’s baptism. Many of those Fathers whose baptism was postponed insisted later on that families baptize their new born children, notably St. John Chrysostom, St. Ambrose, and St. Cyril of Alexandria.

Controversy over infant baptism did not arise in its present form until after the Protestant Reformation. Even Martin Luther and John Calvin insisted on the practice. It was with Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), of the Swiss Reformed Church, that the first serious objections arose. Several of Zwingli’s students re-baptized themselves, proclaiming that they did so because their infant baptisms were invalid since they were not accompanied by professions of faith. This ignited a debate in the early Reformed churches, which was heavily influenced by social and political dimensions as well as theology. Soon after, former Anglican minister John Smyth (1570–1612) and his followers re-baptized themselves and the Baptist Church was born.

The 1644 London Confession of the Calvinist Particular Baptists stated, “*Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, given by Christ, to be dispersed only upon persons professing faith.*” There are many million Baptists today, and this position on baptism is still among their foremost doctrines.



Protestant objections to baptizing children did not emerge from a vacuum-sealed objective reading of the Scriptures. Such objections arose from assumptions which were of recent origin and should not be retroactively applied to the Scriptures nor to the Church which arose within and around them.

What Does the Bible Say?

The Bible describes five separate household baptisms:

- The Household of Cornelius, Acts 11:13–14: “Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.”
- The Household of Lydia, Acts 16:15: “And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us.”
- The Philippian Jailor’s Household, Acts 16:33: “And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.”
- The Household of Crispus, Acts 18:8: “Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.”
- The Household of Stephanas, 1 Corinthians 1:16: “Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas.”



The word ‘household’ for any Israelite of the day included everybody in the household, children included. We must remember that a household always included children throughout the Scriptures. Every time God established or spoke about His covenant with the House of Israel, it included the whole of Israel: men, women, and children. Noah’s whole ‘household’ was taken into the ark with him (Genesis 7:1); Abraham had his whole household circumcised (Genesis 17:23), and specifically his son Isaac when he was eight days old (Genesis 21:4); the whole

household of every family was taken out of Egypt, and God’s institution of the Passover specifically included the children (Exodus 12:24–28). If the Apostles had taught that children were to be excluded from full inclusion in the covenant, such an innovation

would not have fit the prophetic covenants which preceded the fulfilled covenant enacted through Christ.

The pattern of the Old Testament covenants formed the framework for the apostolic understanding of the true covenant of Christ, and those covenants included children. They were covenants which were made with a nation, in which every household participated. This is what is expressed in the household baptisms of the New Testament. Even when an individual was baptized, this baptism placed him in a larger body. Individual adult baptisms occurred, but there were no individual covenants.

The Bible teaches us that under the Old Covenant, every male child was circumcised on the eighth day after birth. With his circumcision, the child became a full and complete member of the covenant and could eat of the Passover sacrifice. Baptism in Christ absorbed and fulfilled this rite, as it absorbed all initiation and cleansing rites of the day. Circumcision, we know from the first council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:5; Acts 21:21), was no longer necessary for the Gentile convert or his children. Nowhere in the Bible is it hinted that while absorbing the rite of circumcision, baptism would suddenly and without precedent exclude children. Jesus did not have a problem with children gaining full inclusion to the covenant: He Himself was circumcised as an infant (Luke 2:21), like John the Forerunner (Luke 1:59).

Here we need to introduce a statement by Jesus Himself on the subject of children and faith. In Luke 18, some children are brought to Him to receive a blessing. His disciples try to interfere. But Jesus immediately rebukes them, saying, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:16). A sentimental reading of this passage tells us that Jesus loves children, and that we should not stop them from trying to ask questions about Him or wanting to pray to Him, or tell them that they are too young to get to know Him. While this is true, no one the Lord is talking to thought differently. These were people, we have to remember, who circumcised their children, included them in the Passover rituals and taught them from a young age about God, Israel and the Prophetic writings. The Jews were fanatical, by our modern standards, in their desire to raise their children in the faith. This is not a Hallmark moment in the Gospels.

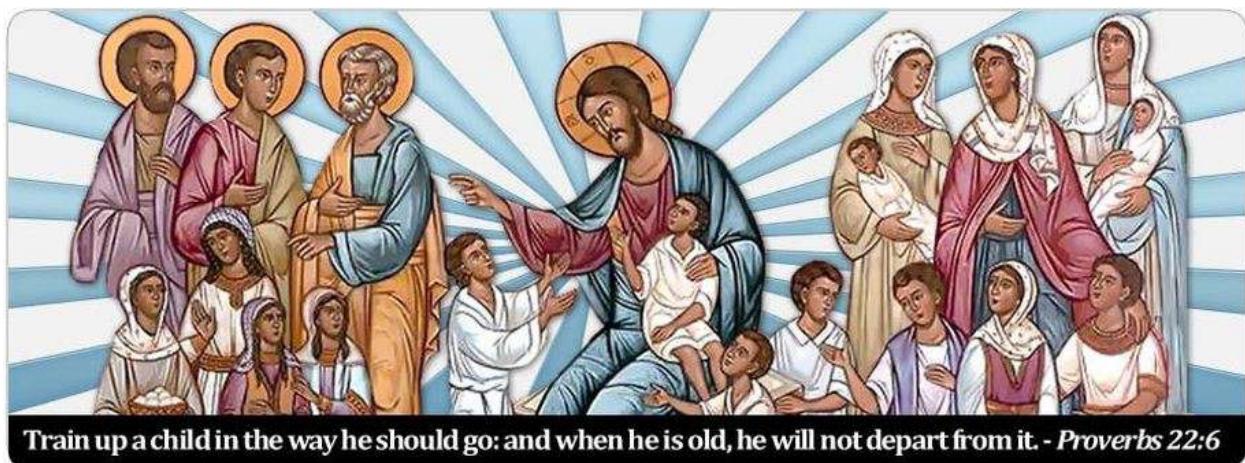
Jesus is in fact including children in His Kingdom. And His inclusion of children in the Kingdom includes them in the covenant He establishes in His Name. There is no partial involvement in the Kingdom of Heaven, just as there is no partial inclusion in the covenant. We are either members or not. Jesus is saying that children are in, and there is to be no argument about it. There is absolutely no room here to make an argument



that children must wait until some magical age before they too can be included with full rights into the Church and at the altar table.

Jesus was once an infant Himself. And Jesus was never separate from God, even in His mother's womb. The heretical Nestorians claimed that Jesus' divinity only descended upon Him at baptism. But the Orthodox Church has always declared that He united God and man from the moment of His conception, and the Orthodox believe that His Kingdom belongs to children. Not only because the covenant is with the whole household; not only because a distinction of age was never introduced into the practice of baptism; not only because such a distinction would not have matched the Old Testament covenants which served as the prophetic model for the New Covenant; but because Christ Himself became incarnate as an infant child. In Him all ages, like all humanity, are sewn into the perfect union expressed in the eucharistic supper of the New Israel, which we join only through baptism. Christ makes both childhood and adulthood fully capable of expressing and participating in the Kingdom of Heaven.]

But the Children Do Not Understand the Faith!



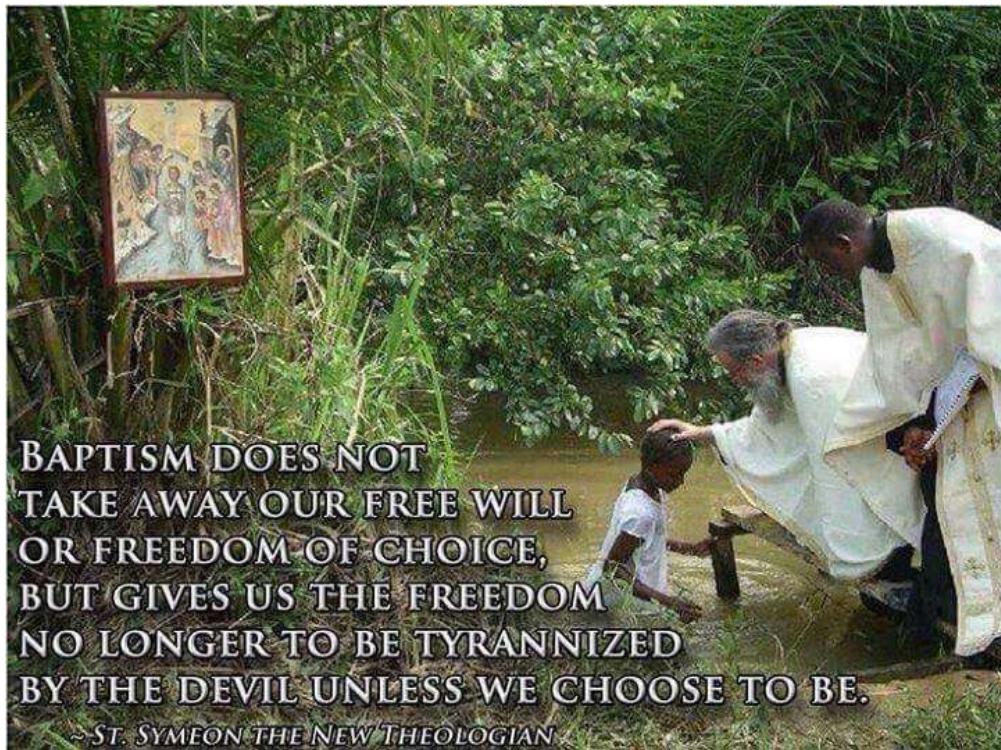
Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. - Proverbs 22:6

The assumption behind this objection to infant baptism, one which did not exist in the early Church or in the centuries which followed, is that faith is a product of reason. That to truly believe, our minds must be capable of understanding why we believe, or at least able to provide intellectual consent. For the adult convert to the Orthodox Church, intellectual consent is crucial. Baptism is not magic. It is a voluntary act of submission to God, a consent to live in relationship with God within the covenant He has established through His Son with a larger body of baptized believers, the Church. But at the same time, faith falls flat if it does not go beyond individual reason. It falls flat because it is so individualized, exclusive, and self-centered. Tertullian said famously that "one Christian is no Christian." It is true that our faith must be personal, that we must have a personal relationship with God. But our faith must not be limited to that personal relationship alone. Our relationship with God is valid only if it is realized in communion with the whole Church.

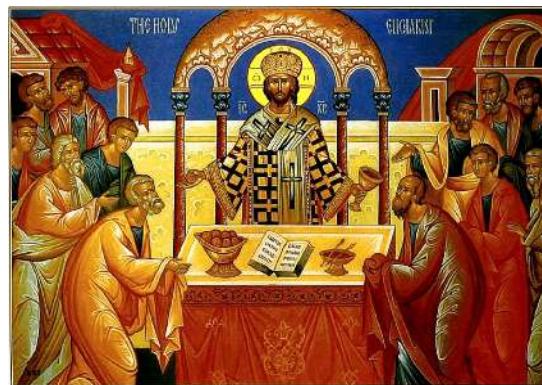
I've spoken of the Church as family, and I want to return to that image. Children can break fellowship with the family if they consider themselves outside the family's fate. They are family members only in so much as they live as part of the family, accepting all the responsibilities and self-sacrifice that such family status demands. I don't have to explain this to my children. They understand from birth that they belong to a larger group, and belong in the most intimate way. They know who their father and mother are and where to go for help and for security. The concept of 'family' is beyond them, but the reality of family life is not. In other words, children have a sense of belonging a dozen years or more before they understand what this belonging means.

The earthly family is an image of the heavenly family, the family of the Kingdom of God. Children born to a Christian family are born again into the heavenly family through baptism. A child baptized in the Orthodox Church belongs to a spiritual family. This family bridges both heaven and earth, stretches backward and forward in time and includes both saints and angels. Children belong to this family exactly as each of my daughters belongs to my family. They know in a profound way that they belong long before they have some kind of cerebral understanding of that belonging.

Our modern world so exults reason and cerebralism that young children are sometimes treated as not fully human, or are at least treated less seriously than adults because they can't think like we do. The truth is that a child is a full human being. A child of any age is capable of expressing and participating in the glory of God. Christ Himself sanctified every age as God-bearing, since He was as much the perfect Word of God as an infant as when He was a grown man. We must remember that children are not second-class persons. Their baptisms are as significant to them and to God as adult baptisms. Even if they do not cognitively understand what that baptism means, they are certainly capable of intuitively understanding it.



WEEK 8: HOLY EUCHARIST



Observation or Question # 1 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 2 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 3 from Online Class:

The Early Church's Understanding of the Eucharist

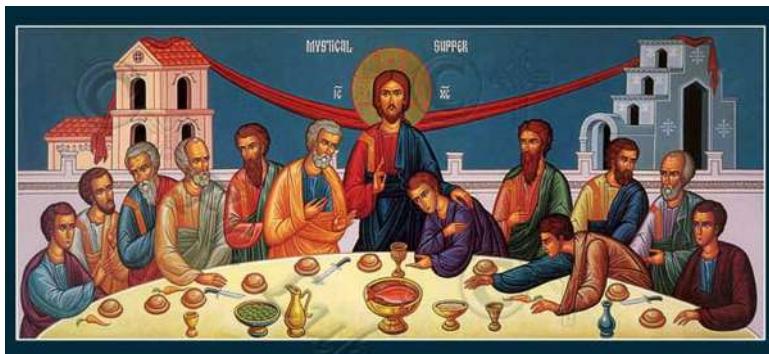
There are many different beliefs, interpretations, and thoughts about what the Eucharist is, especially in the landscape of Christian denominations found in the United States. Is it a symbol of the Body and Blood of God? Is it a way for Christians to come together in unity to remember our Lord's Sacrifice on the Cross? Does the bread and wine that is offered truly become the Body and Blood of God Himself?

One of the best ways to answer the difficult questions in Christian Theology is to look at what the earliest Christians (those who were either taught by the apostles or their descendants) believed. Below, you will find various quotes regarding the Eucharist from some of the earliest Bishops and Saints of the Church during the first 3 centuries. The final quote is from perhaps the greatest Christian Orator of all time, St. John Chrysostom, whose Divine Liturgy we celebrate on Sundays outside of Great Lent.

Holy Scriptures

What better place is there to start than through Holy Scripture? Although there are numerous references to the Eucharist, let us look at two of them which can help answer our question about what Holy Communion truly is.

Our Lord said in Luke 22, "This **IS** my Body...this **IS** my blood." He never says these gifts merely symbolize His Body and Blood. Critics have charged that Jesus also said of Himself "**I am the door**" (John 10:7), and He is certainly not a seven foot wooden plank. The flaw in that argument is obvious: At no time has the Church ever believed that Christ was a literal door. She has, however, always believed that the consecrated gifts of bread and wine are truly His Body and Blood, as we will discover in the writings of the early Church later in this study.



bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks is an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself not concerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep" (which literally translated "are dead")

One might ask why St. Paul would use such strong language if Holy Communion was but a mere symbol?

St. Paul's words in his first letter to the Corinthians, speak about how those who receive Christ's Body and Blood unworthily are said to bring condemnation to themselves:
"Therefore whoever eats this bread and drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the

St. Ignatius of Antioch (110 A.D.)

St. Ignatius was a disciple of the Apostle John, and was the second Bishop of Antioch, one of the original local Churches. Tradition suggests that it was St. Ignatius who was the small child that Christ hugged before saying: “*Unless you turn and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*” (Matthew 18:3). St. Ignatius is sometimes called “God Bearer”, not only because he bore God in his heart and prayed unceasingly to Him, but because it was God incarnate Who once held St. Ignatius in His own arms.

Here are some of St. Ignatius’s quotes on the Eucharist, taken from his letter to the Romans and to the Smyrnaeans:



“I have no taste for corruptible food nor the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was the seed of David; and for drink I desire His blood, which is love incorruptible.”

“Take note of those who hold heterodox opinions of the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us, and see how contrary their opinions are to the mind of God. They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which that Father, in His goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes.”

St. Justin Martyr (151 A.D.)

After being baptized at age 13, St. Justin spent a majority of his life preaching the Gospel among the Pagans of the Roman Empire. During the first persecution of Christians, he was known for many of his writings and debates against various Pagan and Jewish Philosophers. He was eventually tortured and martyred in Rome in the year 165.

In his First Apology 66, written in 151 AD, St. Justin writes about why it is important to have received baptism before partaking of the Eucharist, thus showing the importance of “Closed Communion”:

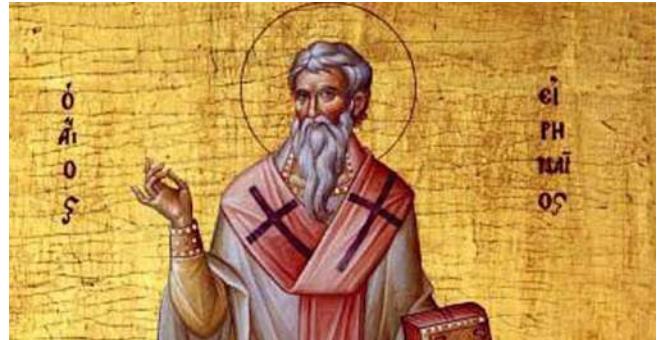
“We call this food Eucharist, and no one else is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true and who has washed in the washing which is for the remission of sins and for regeneration (baptism) and is thereby living as Christ enjoined. For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the Word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nurtured, is both the flesh and blood of that incarnated Jesus.”

St. Irenaeus of Lyon (189 A.D.)

St. Irenaeus was born in 130 A.D., and was a disciple of St. Polycarp, who received the faith and the laying on of hands by St. John the Evangelist Himself. Throughout his lifetime, many heresies (choosing to believe something other than what was passed down) began to creep up in Christianity. St. Irenaeus was especially known for his writings on refuting these heresies, and famously spoke out against the dangers of personal interpretation of the faith:

“Anyone who desires to know truth ought to turn to the Church, since through Her alone did the apostles expound the Divine Truth. She is the door to life!”

In St. Irenaeus's writing "Against Heresies," written in 189 A.D., St. Irenaeus wrote **against** the thought that it is impossible for the Eucharist to be the Body and Blood of God.



“He has declared the cup, a part of creation, to be His own blood, from which He causes our blood to flow; and the bread, a part of creation, He has established as His own body, from which He gives increase unto our bodies. When, therefore, the mixed cup and baked bread receives the Word of God and becomes the Eucharist, the body of Christ, and from these the substance of our flesh is increased and supported, how can they say that the flesh is not capable of receiving the gift of God, which is eternal life—flesh which is nourished by the body and blood of the Lord, and is in fact a member of Him?”

St. Cyprian of Carthage (A.D. 251)

St. Cyprian was born in Carthage in about the year 200. He was a very gifted orator and a teacher of rhetoric and philosophy in the school of Carthage. After he became Bishop, St. Cyprian was known for his writings to those who had left the faith under the pressure of Christian Persecution. In his writing called "The Lapsed" written in 251 A.D., talks about the importance of confession and the cleansing of the conscience before partaking of the Holy Eucharist:

“St. Paul threatens, moreover, the stubborn and forward, and denounces them saying, “Whosoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. (1 Cor. 11:27)”. All these warnings being scorned and contemned, lapsed Christians will often take Communion before their sin is expiated, before confession is made of their crime, before their conscience has been purged by sacrifice and by the hand of the priest, (and so) violence is done to His body and blood; and they sin now against their Lord more with their hand and mouth than when they denied their Lord.”

St. John Chrysostom (4th Century)

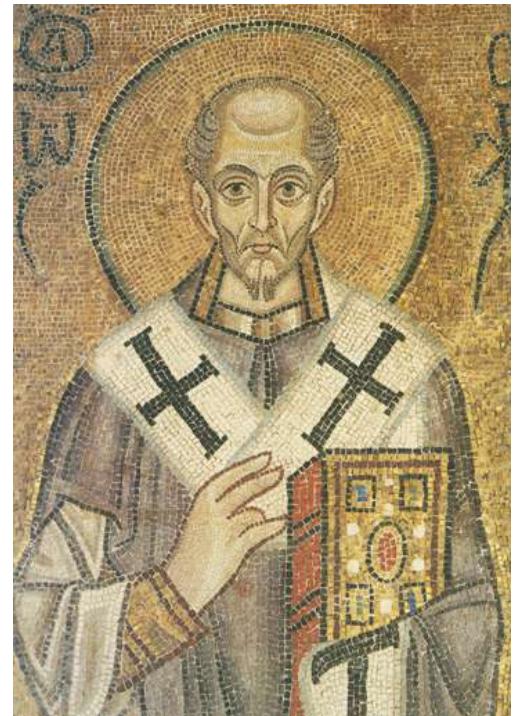
St. John Chrysostom was born in Antioch in the year 347. His pastoral zeal, as well as his famous homilies, gave him the nickname “St. John the Golden Mouthed”. He is known for many of his writings, and is revered not only amongst the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, but also by many Protestant Scholars as well. His homily on Great and Holy Pascha is still read to this day after the Midnight Service on the Eve of the Resurrection.

In perhaps one of the most striking images of what the Eucharist is, Here is one of St. John Chrysostom’s homilies on 1 Timothy, where he speaks in the person of Christ about what the Eucharist truly is, and what it does for us as Christians:

“But what shall I say? Is it not in this way only that I have shown My Love to you? Why have I suffered? For you I was spit upon. For you I was scourged. I emptied myself of glory. I left my Father and came to you, who hates Me, and turns from Me, and loathes to hear my Name.

I pursued You. I ran after You that I might overtake You. I united and joined You to myself! “Eat Me, Drink Me” I said. Above I hold You and below I embrace You. Is it not enough for You that I have Your first fruits above? Doesn’t this satisfy Your affection?

I descended below. I not only am mingled with You, I am entwined in You. I am masticated (chewed), broken into minute particles, that the interspersion and commixture and union may be more complete. Things that are united remain in their own limits, but I am interwoven with You. I would have no more any division between us. I will, that we both be one.”

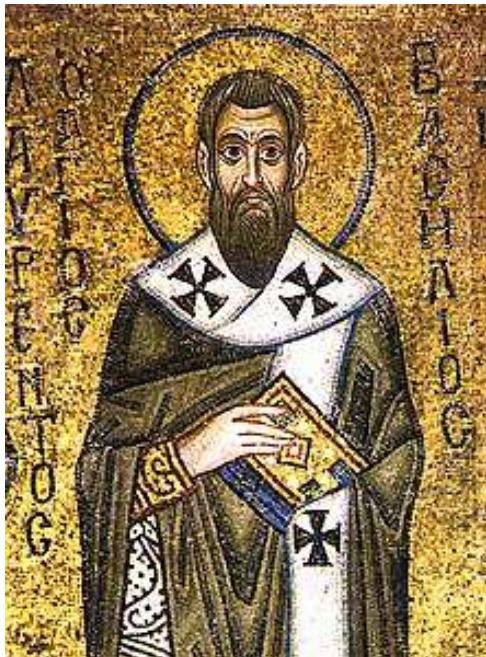


THE ANOPHORA PRAYERS OF ST. BASIL THE GREAT

One of the things that you have no doubt heard numerous times in class, or have heard about while studying the Orthodox Faith, is that in the Worship services of the Church, "we pray what we believe, and we believe what we pray". In one of the greatest examples of that axiom, let us look and be inspired by the Anophora Prayers written by St. Basil the Great (4th Century)!

The Unknowable God

In the first of the Anophora prayers, St. Basil begins by speaking about our unworthiness to worship God, and the unknowability of the first person of the Trinity, the Father. Notice how he uses "Apophatic Theology" to "describe He Who cannot be described!"



O Existing One, Master, Lord God, Father Almighty and Adorable: It is truly meet and right and befitting the magnificence of Thy holiness to praise Thee, to sing to Thee, to bless Thee, to worship Thee, to give thanks to Thee, to glorify Thee - the Only Truly Existing God - and to offer to Thee this our reasonable worship with a contrite heart and a spirit of humility, for Thou hast granted us the knowledge of Thy Truth. Who can utter Thy mighty acts? Or make all Thy praises known? Or tell of all Thy miracles at all times? O Master of all, Lord of heaven and earth and of all creation, both visible and invisible, Who sitteth upon the throne of glory and beholds the depths; without beginning, invisible, incomprehensible, indescribable, changeless, O Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...

After speaking of the unknowability of the Father, St. Basil then begins to speak of the attributes and knowledge that we have of the Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ:

...the great God and Savior, our hope, Who is the image of Thy goodness, the seal of Thy very likeness, showing forth in Himself Thee, O Father - the Living Word, the True God, the enteral Wisdom, the Life, the Sanctification, the Power, the True Light, through whom the Holy Spirit was revealed...

St. Basil rounds out speaking about the Trinity by now describing the works of the Holy Spirit:

The Spirit of Truth, the gift of sonship, the pledge of the future inheritance, the first fruits of eternal blessings, the life-creating power, the fountain of sanctification, through

Whom every creature of reason and understanding worships Thee and always sings to Thee a hymn of glory, for all things are Thy Servants.

Having described for us the Holy Trinity, St. Basil now describes for us the heavenly worship that is being offered by the Angels. Because we are participating in heavenly worship at every Divine Liturgy, we repeat and sing with all of creation the “Triumphal Hymn” after we wrap up this first prayer of St. Basil.

...Thou art praised by angels, archangels, thrones, dominions, principalities, authorities, powers, and many-eyed cherubim. Round about Thee stand the seraphim, one with six wings and the other with six wings; with two they cover their faces, with two they cover their feet, and with two they fly, crying one to another with unceasing voices and every resounding praises, Singing the triumphant hymn, shouting, proclaiming and saying:



“Holy Holy Holy, Lord of Sabaoth, Heaven and earth are full of Thy Glory. Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the Highest!

Having now established the scene of Heavenly Worship that we are now participating in, St. Basil now recounts the entire History of our Salvation. He starts by speaking of Adam in creation, and the life which man lived before the

fall:

With these blessed powers, O Master who lovest mankind, we sinners also cry aloud and say: “Holy art Thou - truly most holy - and there are no bounds to the magnificence of Thy holiness. Thou art gracious in all Thy deeds, for with righteousness and true judgment Thou hast ordered all things for us. When Thou didst create man by taking dust from the earth, and didst honor him with Thine own image, O God, Thou didst set him in a paradise of delight, promising him eternal life and the enjoyment of everlasting blessings in the observing of Thy Commandments.

St. Basil then goes into the consequences of the fall of Adam, but speaks of the hope that comes from the Incarnation of Christ!

But when man disobeyed Thee, the true God who had created him, and was deceived by the guile of the serpent, becoming subject to death through his own transgressions, Thou, O God, in Thy righteous judgment, didst send him forth from paradise into this world, returning him to the earth from which he was taken, yet providing him the salvation of regeneration in Thy Christ Himself. For Thou didst not turn away Thyselv forever from Thy creature whom Thou hadst made, O Good One, nor didst Thou forget the work of Thy hands.

St. Basil then recounts how after the Fall, God prepared the world for the coming of Christ:

Through the tender compassion of Thy mercy, Thou didst visit him (man) in various ways: Thou didst send prophets; Thou didst perform mighty works by Thy saints, who in every generation were well pleasing to Thee; Thou didst speak to us by the mouths of Thy servants the prophets, foretelling to us the salvation which was to come. Thou didst give us the Law as a help. Thou didst appoint angels as guardians. And when the fulness of time had come, Thou didst speak to us through Thy Son Himself...

St. Basil then spends a few sentences describing who Jesus Christ, the Son of God was. You will notice that he uses language which debunked the Arian heresy which said that Christ was not God, but rather an exalted and created creature:

...by whom Thou didst also make the ages; who being the Radiance of Thy glory and the Image of Thy person, upholding all things by the word of His power, thought it not robbery to be equal to Thee, the God and Father. He was God before the ages, yet He appeared on earth and lived among men, becoming incarnate of a Holy Virgin; He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being likened to the body of our lowliness, that He might liken us to the image of His glory.

The focus of the prayer speaks about how the Incarnation of the Word of God brings about Salvation:

For as by man sin entered into the world and by sin death, so it pleased Thine Only-Begotten Son, who was in the bosom of Thee, the God and Father, who was born of a woman, the Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, who was born under the law to condemn sin in His flesh, so that those who were dead in Adam, might be made alive in Thy Christ Himself. He lived in this world and gave us commandments of salvation; releasing us from the delusions of idolatry, He brought us to the knowledge of Thee, the God and Father. He obtained us for His own chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.



Having cleansed us in water, and sanctified us with the Holy Spirit, He gave Himself as a ransom to death, in which we were held captive, sold under sin. Descending through the cross into hell, that He might fill all things with Himself, He loosed the pangs of death. He arose on the third day, having made for all flesh a path to the resurrection from the dead, since it was not possible for the Author of Life to be a victim of corruption. So He became the first fruits of those who had fallen asleep, the first-born of the dead, that He might be Himself truly the first in all things.

Ascending into heaven, He sat down at the right hand of Thy majesty on high, and He will come to render to every man according to his works.

St. Basil now describes the institution and importance of the Eucharist for which we are soon to partake of:

And as memorials of His saving Passion, He has left us these things, which we have set forth according to His command. For when He was about to go forth to His voluntary, and ever-memorable and life-creating death- ni the night in which He gave Himself up for the life of the world - took bread in His holly and pure hands. Having shown it to Thee, the God and Father, and having given thanks, blessed and hallowed it and broken it, He gave it to His Holy Disciples and Apostles saying:



“Take, Eat. This is My Body which is broken for You, for the remission of sins.”

Likewise, He took the cup of the fruit of the vine, and having mingled it and given thanks, blessed and hallowed it, He gave it to His Holy Disciples and Apostles saying:

“Drink of it , all of you. This is My Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins. Do this in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this Bread and drink this Cup, you proclaim My Death, you confess My Resurrection.”

Therefore, we also, O Master, remembering His saving Passion and life-creating Cross, His three- day Burial and Resurrection, His Ascension into heaven nd Sitting at the right hand of Thee the God and Father ,and His glorious and awesome Second Coming...

“Thine own of Thine Own, we offer Thee, on behalf of all and for all!”

WEEK 9: REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION



Observation or Question # 1 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 2 from Online Class:

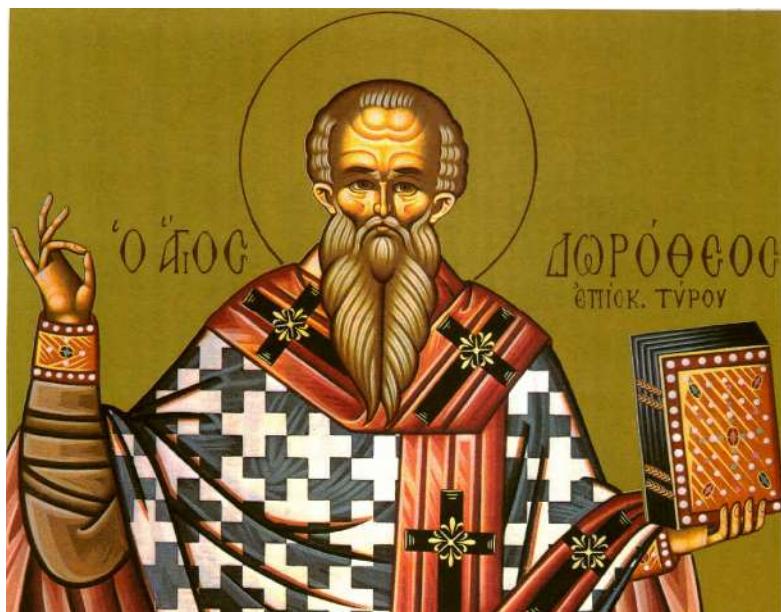
Observation or Question # 3 from Online Class:

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN LIFE: ON THE CONSCIENCE BY ST. DOROTHEOS OF GAZA

WHEN GOD CREATED man, he breathed into him something divine, as it were a hot and bright spark added to reason, which lit up the mind and showed him the difference between right and wrong. This is called the conscience, which is the law of his nature. This is compared to the well which Jacob dug, as the Fathers say, and which the Philistines filled up. [cf. Genesis 26:15] That is, to this law of conscience adhered the patriarchs and all the holy men of old before the written law, and they were pleasing to God. But when this law was buried and trodden underfoot by men through the onset of sin, we needed a written law, we needed the holy prophets, we needed the instruction of our Master, Jesus Christ, to reveal it and raise it up and bring to life through the observance of the Commandments that buried spark.

It is in our power either to bury it again or, if we obey it, to allow it to shine and illuminate us. When our conscience says to us, 'do this!' and we despise it and it speaks again and we do not do it but continue to despise it, at last we bury it and it is no longer able to speak clearly to us from the depths where we have laid it. But like a lamp shining on a damaged mirror, it reflects things

dimly and darkly, just as you cannot see the reflection of your face in muddy water. We are found unable to perceive what our conscience says to us so that we think we have hardly any conscience. No one is without a conscience, since it is something divinely implanted in us, as we have already said, and it can never be destroyed. It always patiently reminds us of our duties, but sometimes we do not perceive that we are despising it and treading it underfoot. This is why the prophet bewails Ephraim and says, 'Ephraim prevails against his adversary and treads down judgment.' [Hosea 10:11] The adversary here is 'conscience.' Here the Gospel says, 'Come to an agreement with your adversary while you are on the way with him, lest he deliver you to the judge and the judge to the warders



and they put you in chains. Amen, I say to you, you shall not leave the place until you have paid the last farthing.' [Mt. 5:25-26] Why does he call conscience the adversary? It is called the adversary because it always opposes our evil desires and tells what we ought to do and we do not, or what we ought not to do and we do; and it accuses us, and so conscience is called our adversary, and Our Lord admonishes, 'Come to an agreement with your adversary while you are on the way;' for the 'way' as St Basil says, is this world.

Let us be zealous, brothers, to guard our conscience for as long as we are in this world and not to neglect its promptings in anything. And let us not tread it under foot even in the least thing, for you can see that from the smallest things,

which of their nature are worth little, we come to despise the great things. When we begin to say, 'What is it if I say just these few words? What does it matter if I eat this morsel? What difference if I poke my nose in here or there? From this way of saying, 'What does this or that matter?' a man takes evil and bitter nourishment and begins presently to despise greater and more serious things and even to tread down his own conscience and so, at last destroying it, bit by bit, he falls into danger and finally becomes completely



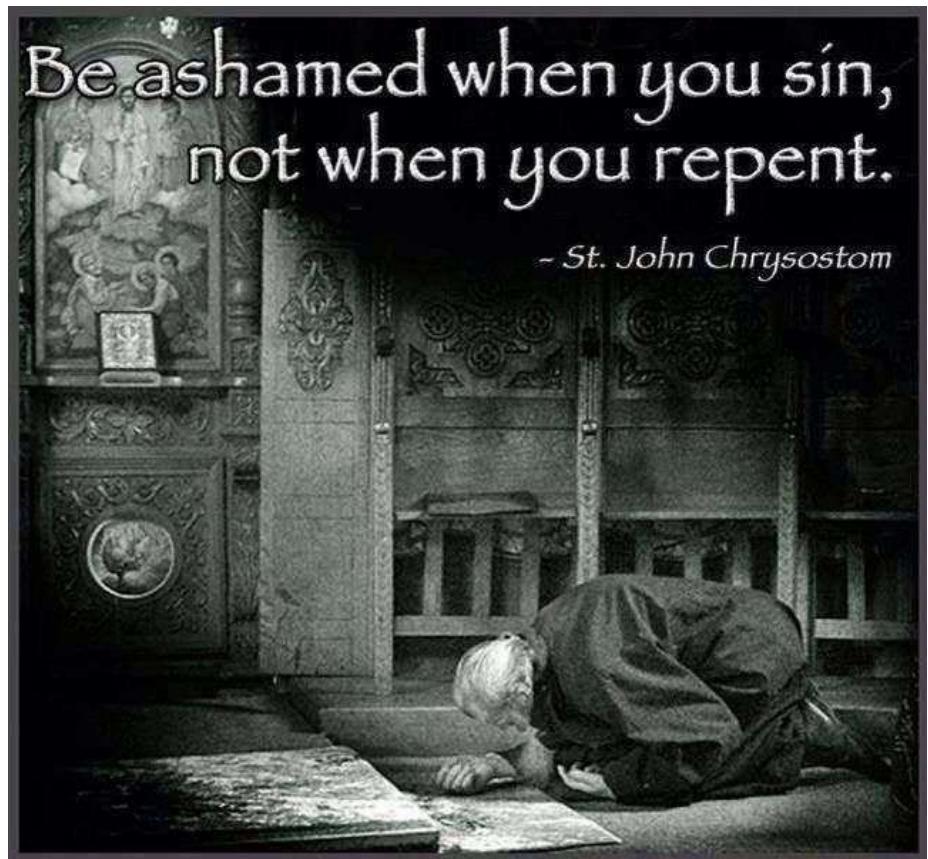
impervious to the light of conscience.

Therefore, brothers, see to it that we do not neglect little things; see to it that we do not despise them as of no account. There are no 'little things' - for when it is a question of bad habits, it is a question of a malignant ulcer. Let us live circumspectly, let us give heed to trivial matters when they are trivial, lest they become grave. Doing what is right and what is wrong: both begin from small things and advance to what is great, either good or evil. Therefore Our Lord warns us to take account of our conscience as one giving evidence of his own experience and saying 'Be careful, simpleton, see what you are doing, come to

an agreement with your adversary while yet on the road' and he shows the danger to be feared: 'Lest he deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the executioner and he throw you into prison.' And what else? 'Amen, I tell you, he shall not go from there until he has paid the last farthing.' [Mt. 5:26] Conscience then warns us, as I said, about what is good or what is bad and shows us what to do and what not to do, and in the world to come it will accuse us. Therefore it says, 'Lest he deliver you to the judge...' etc.

In attending to our conscience, we need to consider many different factors. A man needs to satisfy his conscience towards God, towards his neighbor, and towards material things. As regards God: he must not despise God's precepts, even those concerning things which are not seen by men or those things for which one is not accountable to men. A man should obey his conscience in relation to God; for example, did he neglect his prayer? If an evil thought came into his heart, was he vigilant and did he keep control of himself or did he entertain it? He sees his neighbor saying something or doing something; does he suspect it's evil and condemn him? To put it simply, all the hidden things that happen inside us, things which no one sees except God and our conscience, we need to take account of. This is what I mean by our conscience towards God.

To respect our conscience towards our neighbor means not to do anything that we think may trouble or harm our neighbor in deed, or word, or gesture, or look. For there are gestures, as I very often tell you, which hurt our neighbors and there are looks capable of wounding him and, to speak plainly, whatever a man does readily, knowing it gives his neighbor a bad thought stains his own conscience because it means that he is ready to harm or trouble his neighbor-and



this is the sort of thing I mean by keeping a good conscience towards our neighbor.

As regards keeping a good conscience in respect of material things: not to use things badly, not to render things useless, not to leave things about, and when we find things left about not to leave them even if they are of small value, but to pick them up and put them in their proper place. Not to be slovenly about our clothes or wear them out too quickly: for example, when one can wear a shirt a week or two, to want to wash it every day and so by constant washing wear it out too quickly and always be asking for new. These things are against the conscience. Similarly about the bed, often when one can make do with a small mattress, one asks for a large one; and when one has a blanket, one wants to exchange it for a new one or a better one for the sake of prestige or from mere thoughtlessness. Or where a rush mat is adequate one asks for a carpet and is quick to protest unless one gets it; or one approaches one of the brethren and says, 'Why has so-and-so got such a thing and I haven't?' Such a man is not on the right road. Or a man hangs his tunic or blanket in the sun and through negligence leaves it there to spoil- this is all against the conscience. It is the same about food: a man is perfectly able to satisfy the needs of his body with bread, vegetables, and few olives, but he gives up doing so and seeks something more tasty and more expensive-all this is against the conscience.



The Fathers tell us that a monk ought not to give his conscience occasion to reproach him about anything at all. [Apo Agathon 2; PG 65:109] It is necessary, therefore, brothers, to keep watch over ourselves always and to keep ourselves away from all these things lest we fall into danger. For Our Lord also will bring an indictment against us, as we have said above. May God grant we listen and be attentive to these things, lest the sayings of our Fathers turn out to be for us words of condemnation.

WEEK 10: CHURCH ECCLESIOLOGY AND THE PRIESTHOOD



Observation or Question # 1 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 2 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 3 from Online Class:

WEEK 11: THE MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE



Observation or Question # 1 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 2 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 3 from Online Class:

THE ETERNALITY OF MARRIAGE

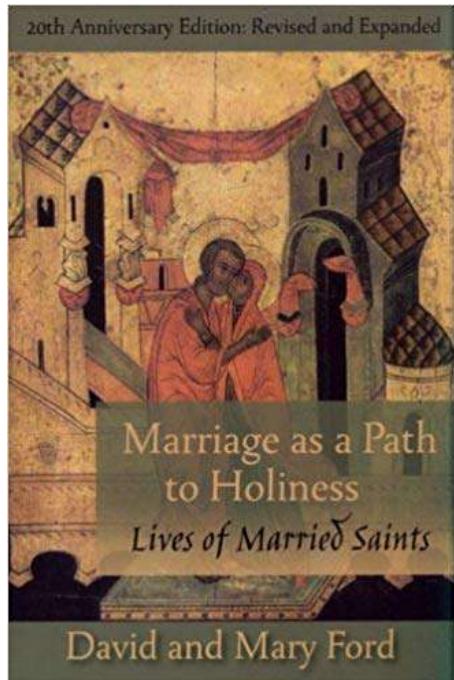
Except from "Marriage as a Path to Holiness" by Dr. David and Mary Ford

It is a popular sentiment in today's day and age, that marriage and married life is a contract and a vow you take with your spouse, that dissolves after you close your eyes to this world. In fact, we often hear in the vows of more modern day weddings: "Do you promise to love, cherish, and hold this woman/man whom you see here before you, to have and to hold, until death do you part?"

The Orthodox Ancient Tradition of the Church never saw marriage in this way... but instead understands it to be a relationship that lasts for eternity! Here is an except from Dr. David and Dr. Mary Ford's book, "Marriage as a Path to Holiness":

Just before the end of the Orthodox Christian marriage service, the priest takes the crowns off of the heads of the newly married couple, and sings praise to the Lord saying: "*Receive their crowns into the kingdom, preserving them spotless, blameless, and without reproach, onto ages of ages.*"

It is as if the church is saying to the bridal pair: "*You have worn these earthly crowns briefly, at the very beginning of your life together; now strive hard to earn the heavenly crowns that you will wear forever.*"



This brings us to the understanding of marriage as **eternal** in the Orthodox Tradition. Christ said that in the resurrection, "*they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in Heaven.*" (Matthew 22:30) Some people take this to imply that marriage is dissolved after death. This passage, however, refers to just one particular aspect of marriage...having children (specifically here, to raise up descendants for one's deceased brother – the Jewish custom of "levirate" marriage). That aspect of marriage certainly passes away, and people will "*neither marry nor be given in marriage*", as Christ stated.

However, the love and help towards salvation and holiness that the spouses have given each other in this life does not pass away, Saint Paul declares, "*Love never fails*" (1 Cor. 13:8). Indeed, since the integrity of our mind and soul remains intact as we move from this life into the next life, all the familial relationships that we have had in this life somehow continue into the next, just as the Theotokos continues to be Christ's mother forever. So praying that Christ will receive their crowns into the heavenly kingdom indicates – at least ideally – that marriage, as "*an indissoluble bond of love*," is eternal.

We find this ideal witnessed in the writings of the Church Fathers and the Lives of the Saints. For instance, some saintly widows who were wealthy, and who partly for

this reason were being pressured to remarry, refused to do so on the grounds that they were still married, even though their spouses had died. This sentiment is also reminiscent of the beautiful words of St. John Chrysostom, written to a younger widow in a long letter of consolation and encouragement. He begins by telling her that "*the affection which you bestowed on him, you can keep now just as you formerly did.*" He then goes on to say:

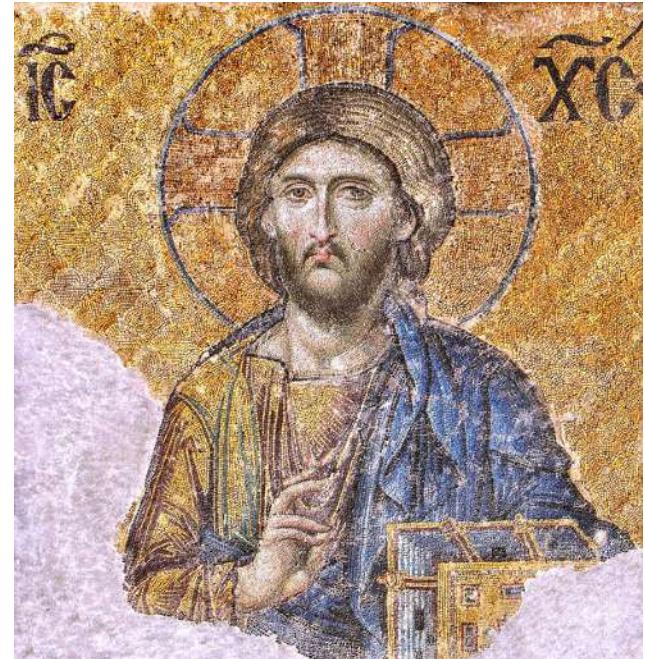
"For such is the power of love: it embraces, and unites, and fastens together not only those who are present, and near, and visible, but also those who are far distant. And neither length of time, nor separation in space, nor anything else of that kind, can break up and divide in pieces the affection of the soul. But if you wish to behold him face to face (for this I know is what you especially long for), keep your bed in his honor, sacred from the touch of any other man. And do you best to manifest a life like this, and then assuredly you will depart one day to join the same company with him, not to dwell with him for five years as you did here, or for twenty or a hundred, or for a thousand years, or twice that number, but for infinite and endless ages."

St. John emphasizes that if the widow wishes to be with her husband in eternity, she must lead the same kind of virtuous life that he did:

"Let your way of life be even more diligent, so that having speedily attained an equal standard of virtue, you may inherit the same abode and be united to him through the everlasting ages, not in union of "earthly" marriage, but another far better...for then there will be a union of soul with soul, which will be more perfect and far more delightful and far nobler kind. By doing this, you will receive him back again no longer in that corporeal beauty which he had when he departed, but in a luster of another kind, with splendor outshining the rays of the sun."

In the Church, married love is seen from a spiritual perspective...from the perspective of Eternity. We do not know exactly how life will be in heaven, but enough indications are given in the Tradition to be confident that those who had loving marriages, each helping the other towards eternal salvation, will be together more perfectly and with greater joy in the heavenly kingdom.

O LORD OUR GOD, CROWN THEM WITH GLORY
AND HONOR!



WEEK 12: HOLY UNCTION AND THEODOICY



Observation or Question # 1 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 2 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 3 from Online Class:

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM: WHY GOD ALLOWS SAINTS TO SUFFER

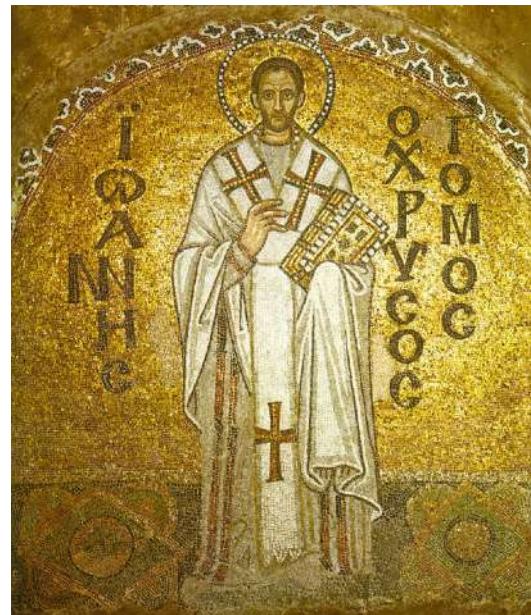
TAKEN FROM HIS FIRST "HOMILY ON THE STATUTES" IN THE 4TH CENTURY

This is an excerpt first homily in a series of homilies called "Homilies of the Statutes", given by St. John Chrysostom when he was a priest in Antioch. During this time, there was a tremendous civil uprising in the city. Many people were dying and being punished by the emperor. There was a lot of fear going around throughout the Church, and theodicy was a popular topic to discuss.

...For you have heard many asking such questions as: "Why ever is it that such a one, a moderate and meek man, comes to be dragged daily before the seat of judgment by another, who is lawless and wicked, and to suffer evils without number... and God permits this? For what reason again was another man, upon false accusation, unjustly put to death? Such a man was drowned; another was thrown down a precipice; and we might speak of many saints, as well in our own days as in the days of our forefathers, who have suffered various tribulations."

To that end, therefore, that we may see the reason of these things, and that we ourselves may not be disturbed, nor overlook the case of others who thus meet with a stumbling-block, we should attend with earnest, heed to the reasons now about to be advanced.

For of the diversified and manifold affliction which befalls the saints, I have reasons, eight in number, to declare unto your love. Therefore let all direct themselves to me with the strictest attention, knowing that there will be no pardon nor excuse left us hereafter, for stumbling at the things which will happen, if after all, when there are so many reasons we are just as much perplexed and disturbed as if there were not one to be found.



A Brief Description of the 8 Reasons Why God Allows Saints to Suffer

The first reason then is, that God permits them to suffer evil, that they may not too easily be exalted into presumption, by the greatness of their good works and miracles.

The second, that others may not have a greater opinion of them than belongs to human nature, and take them to be gods and not men.

The third, that the power of God may be made manifest, in prevailing, and overcoming, and advancing the word preached, through the efficacy of men who are infirm and in bonds.

The fourth, that the endurance of these themselves may become more striking, serving God, as they do, not for a reward; but showing even such right-mindedness as to give proof of their undiminished good will towards Him after so many evils.

The fifth, that our minds may be wise concerning the doctrine of a resurrection. For when you see a just man, and one abounding in virtue, suffering ten thousand evils, and thus departing the present life, you are altogether compelled, though unwillingly, to think somewhat of the future judgment; for if men do not suffer those who have labored for themselves, to depart without wages and recompense; much more cannot God design, that those who have so greatly labored should be sent away uncrowned. But if He cannot intend to deprive those of the recompense of their labors eventually, there must needs be a time, after the end of the life here, in which they will receive the recompense of their present labors.

The sixth, that all who fall into adversity may have a sufficient consolation and alleviation, by looking at such persons, and remembering what sufferings have befallen them.

The seventh, that when we exhort you to the virtue of such persons, and we say to every one of you, Imitate Paul, emulate Peter, ye may not, on account of the surpassing character of their good works, slothfully shrink from such an imitation of them, as deeming them to have been partakers of a different nature.

The eighth, that when it is necessary to call any blessed, or the reverse, we may learn whom we ought to account happy, and whom unhappy and wretched.

St. John's In-depth Explanations of His 8 Reasons

These then are the reasons why God allows saints to suffer; but it is necessary to establish them all from the Scriptures, and to show with exactness that all that has been said on this subject is not an invention of human reasoning, but the very sentence of the Scriptures! For thus will what we say be at once more deserving of credit, and sink the deeper into your minds.

God Permits Saints to Suffer Evil to Help Them from Succumbing to Pride

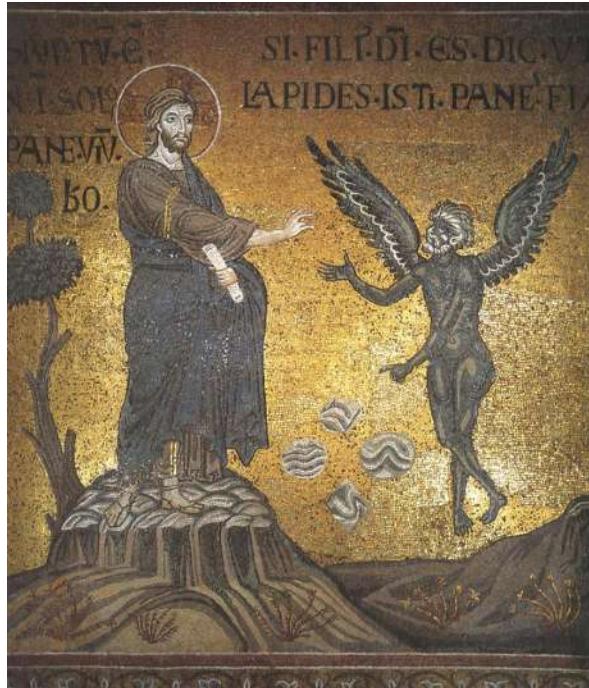
Tribulation then is profitable to the saints, that they may exercise moderation and lowliness, and that they may not be puffed up by their miracles and good works, and that God permits it for this end. We may hear David the prophet, and Paul saying the same. David says: *"It is good for me, Lord, that I have been in trouble, that I might learn your statutes"* and Paul said: *"I was caught up into the third heaven, and transported to Paradise...and lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me."*

What can be clearer than this? *"That I might not be exalted above measure, for this reason"*, says Paul, *"God permitted the messengers of Satan to buffet me"*. By messengers of Satan, indeed, he means not particular demons, but men ministering for the devil, the unbelievers, the tyrants, the heathens, who perseveringly molested and unceasingly worried him. And what Paul says is just this: *God was able to repress these persecutions and successive tribulations; but since I had been caught up into the third heaven, and transported to Paradise, lest through the abundance of these revelations I might be lifted up and think much of myself, he permitted these persecutions, and suffered these messengers of Satan to buffet me with persecutions and afflictions, that I might not be too much exalted.* For although Paul and Peter, and all that are like them, be holy and wonderful men, as indeed they are, yet they are but men, and require much caution lest they should be too easily exalted; and as saints more than others. For nothing is so apt to exalt to presumption as a conscience full of good works, and a soul that lives in confidence. To the end, therefore, that these might suffer nothing of this kind, God permitted that there should be temptations and tribulations; these being powerful to keep them down, and to persuade to the exercise of moderation in all things.



That this very particular also contributes much to the showing forth of God's power, you may learn even from the same Apostle, who told us the former. In order that you may not say, (what indeed unbelievers think), that God in permitting this, is some infirm being, and suffers such persons to be continually afflicted, from not being able to deliver His own from dangers: this very thing, I say, observe how Paul has

demonstrated by means of these events, showing not only that the events were far from accusing Him of weakness, but that they proved His power more strikingly to all. For having said, There was given me a thorn in the flesh; a messenger of Satan to buffet me, and having thus signified his repeated trials, he goes on to add, For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me; and He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is perfected in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). My power, He means, is seen then when you are in weakness; and yet through you, who seem to grow weak, the word preached is magnified, and is sown in all quarters.



When therefore Paul was led to the dungeon, after having received a great number of stripes, he took prisoner the keeper of the prison (Acts 16:24). His feet were in the stocks, and his hands in the chain; and the prison shook at midnight while they were singing hymns.

See you, how His power was perfected in weakness? If Paul had been at large, and had shaken that building, the thing would not have been so wonderful. For this reason, He says, remain bound; and the walls shall be shaken on every side, and the prisoners shall be loosed; in order that My power may appear the greater, when through you, confined and in fetters, all that are in bonds shall be loosed. This very circumstance then it was which at the time astounded the keeper of the prison, that being so forcibly confined, he, through prayer alone, prevailed to shake the foundations, and throw open the doors of the prison, and to unbind all the prisoners. Nor is this the only occasion. But with Peter too, and Paul himself, as well as the other disciples, one may see this occurring constantly; and in the midst of persecution, the grace of God ever flourishing, and appearing by the side of the tribulations, and thus proclaiming His power. Wherefore He says, My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is perfected in weakness.

So That Others Do Not Take Saints to be Gods, and That the Power of God May be Made Manifest in Miracles

But to show that many would be too often ready to imagine things of them above human nature, unless they saw them enduring such afflictions, hear how Paul was afraid on this very point: *For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool, but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he sees me to be, or that he hears of me* (2 Corinthians 12:6).

But what is it that he means? I am able, he declares, to speak of far greater miracles; but I am unwilling; lest the magnitude of the miracles should raise too high a notion of me among men. For this reason Peter also, when they had restored the lame man, and all were wondering at them, in order to restrain the people, and persuade them that they had exhibited nothing of this power of themselves, or from their native strength, says: *Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk* (Acts 3:12)?



And again at Lystra, the people were not only filled with astonishment, but led forth bulls, after crowning them with garlands, and were preparing to offer sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas! Observe the malice of the Devil! By those very same persons through whom the Lord was at work, to purge out ungodliness from the world, by the same did that enemy try to introduce it, again persuading them to take men for gods; which was what he had done in former times.

This is especially that which introduced the principle and root of idolatry. For many, after having had success in wars, and set up trophies, and built cities, and done various other benefits of this kind to the people of those times, came to be esteemed gods by the multitude, and were honored with temples, and altars; and the whole catalogue of the Grecian gods is made up of such men.

That this, therefore, may not be done towards the Saints, God permitted them constantly to be banished — to be scourged — to fall into diseases; that the abundance of bodily infirmity, and the multiplicity of those temptations, might convince those who were then with them, both that they were men, who wrought such wonders, and that they contributed nothing of their own power; but that it was mere grace, that wrought

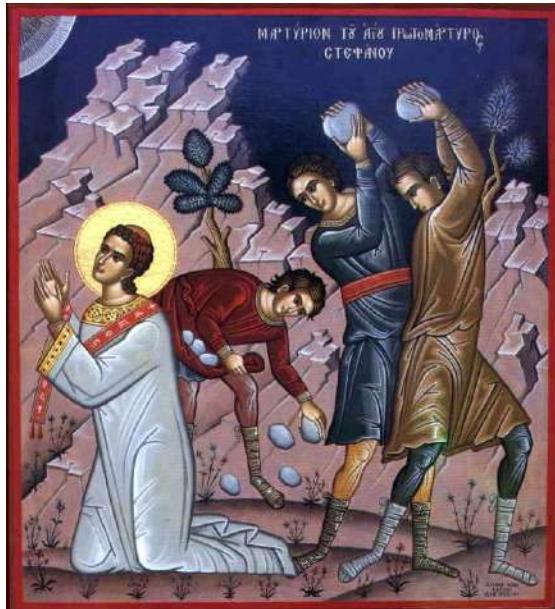
through them all these miracles. For if they took men for gods, who had done but mean and vile things, much rather would they have thought these to be such, had they suffered nothing proper to humanity, when they performed miracles, such as no one had ever before seen or heard of. For if when they were scourged, thrown down precipices, imprisoned, banished, and placed in peril every day, there were, notwithstanding, some who fell into this impious opinion, how much rather would they have been thus regarded, had they endured nothing which belongs to human nature!

That Through Endurance of Their Suffering, True Love for God Can Be Shown (Combatting The Prosperity Gospel and "Mercenary Faith")

This then is the third cause of affliction; and the fourth is, that the saints might not be supposed to serve God from a hope of present prosperity. For many of those who live in debauchery, when blamed as they often are by many, and invited to the labors of virtue; and when they hear the saints commended for their cheerfulness under great hardships, attack their character on this ground; and not men only, but the devil himself has taken up this suspicion.

When Job was surrounded with great wealth, and enjoyed much opulence, that wicked demon, being reproached by God on his account, and having nothing to say; when he could neither answer the accusations against himself, nor impugn the virtue of this just man; took refuge at once in this defense, speaking thus: *Does Job fear you for nought? Have you not made an hedge about him on all sides* (Job 1:9-10)? *For reward then, says he, that man is virtuous, enjoying thereby so much opulence.*

What then did God? Being desirous to show that it was not for reward that his saints serve Him, He stripped Job of all his opulence; gave him over to poverty; and permitted him to fall into grievous disease. Afterwards reproving him, that he had suspected thus without cause, He says, He yet holds fast his integrity; to no purpose did you move me to destroy his substance. For it is a sufficient reward, and compensation to the saints, that they are serving God; since this indeed to the lover is reward enough, to love the object of his love; and he seeks nothing besides, nor accounts anything greater than this. And if such be the case with regard to a man,



much more in relation to God; which therefore that God might demonstrate, He gave more than the devil asked. For the Devil then said: *"Put forth your hand, and touch him* (Job 2:5-6) but God said not thus, but, I deliver him unto you.

Just as in the contests of the outer world, the combatants that are vigorous, and in high condition of body, are not so well discerned, when they are wrapped all around with the garment soaked in oil; but when casting this aside, they are brought forward unclothed into the arena; then above all they strike the spectators on every side with astonishment at the proportion of their limbs, there being no longer anything to conceal them; so also was it with Job.



When Job was enveloped in all that wealth, it was not visible to the many, what a man he was. But when, like the wrestler, that strips off his garment, he threw it aside, and came naked to the conflicts of piety, thus unclothed, he astonished all who saw him; so that the very theatre of angels shouted at beholding his fortitude of soul, and applauded him as he won his crown! For, as I have already observed, he was not so well seen of men, when clad in all that wealth, as when, casting it away like a garment, he exhibited himself naked as it were in a theatre, in the midst of the world, and all admired his vigor of soul, evidenced as this was not only by his being stripped of all things, but by the conflict, and by his patience in respect of his infirmity.

God Himself did not smite Job; in order that the devil might not again say, *You have spared him, and hast not inflicted so great a trial as was necessary.* Rather, God gave to the adversary the destruction of his cattle, and power over his flesh. I am

"BLESSÉD ARE YOU WHEN MEN
SHALL REVILE YOU
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HEAVEN!"

sure, says He, of this wrestler; therefore I do not forbid you to impose on him whatever struggles you desire.. But as those who are well skilled in the sports of the palæstra, and have reason to rely on their art and bodily strength, often do not seize their antagonists upright, nor take an equal advantage, but suffer them to take them by the middle, that they may make a more splendid conquest. So also God gave to the devil to take this saint by the waist, that when he had

overcome, after an attack so greatly to his disadvantage, and stretched his adversary on the ground, his crown might be so much the more glorious!

It is tried gold! Try it as you desire, examine it as you wish, you will not find in it any dross. This shows us not only the fortitude of others, but also brings much farther consolation; for what says Christ: "*Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven!*"

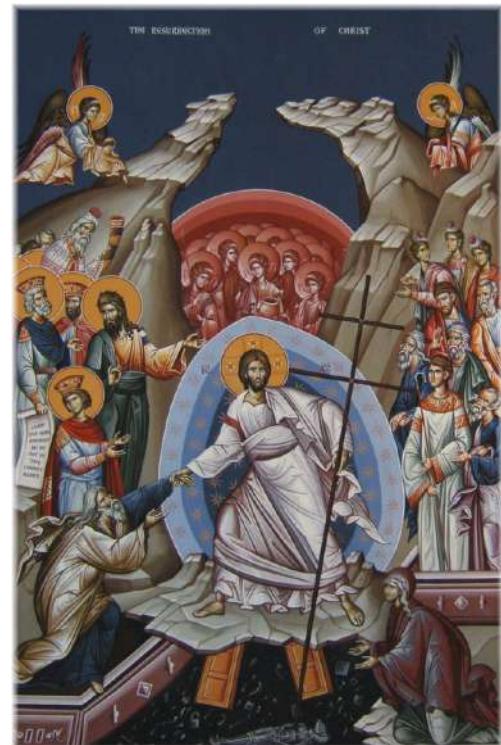
In that same manner did their fathers unto the prophets. Again, Paul writing to the Macedonians in his desire to console them, says: *For you, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which are in Judea. For you also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews.*

(1 Thessalonians 2:14) And again, he consoles the Hebrews in like manner, reckoning up all the just who had lived in furnaces; in pits; in deserts; in mountains; in caves; in hunger; and in poverty (Hebrews 11:34-35). For communion of suffering brings some consolation to the fallen.

So That We Can Always be Reminded of Death, the Judgment, and the Resurrection

But that this also introduces arguments for the resurrection, hear the same Paul again, saying: *If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what shall it profit me if the dead are not raised* (1 Corinthians 15:32). If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men the most miserable (1 Corinthians 16:19).

We suffer, Paul tells us, innumerable evils during the present life. If then there is no other life to be hoped for, what can be more wretched than our condition? Hence it is evident that our affairs are not bounded within the limits of this present state; and this becomes manifest from our trials. For God could never suffer those who have endured so many and so great evils, and who have spent all the present life in trials and dangers without number, to be without a recompense of far greater gifts. If He could not suffer this, it is certain that He has prepared another, a better and brighter life, in which He will crown those who have wrestled in the cause of godliness, and proclaim their praises in the presence of the whole world.



So that Others can be Consoled by Knowing that They Are Not Suffering Alone

When you see a just man straitened and afflicted, and in sickness, and in poverty, as well as innumerable other woes, till he ends this present life...say to yourself, that if there were no resurrection and judgment, God would not have permitted one, who endured such great evils for His sake, to depart hence without enjoying any good thing. From this it is evident, that God has prepared another life, and one which is sweeter and much more endurable. For if it were not so, then he would not suffer many of the wicked to luxuriate through the present life; and many of the just to remain in ten thousand ills: but since there is provided another life, in which he is about to recompense every man according to his deserts; one for his wickedness, another for his virtue; on that account he forbears, while he sees the former enduring evil, and the latter living in luxury.

So That We Do Not Believe that Paul and Peter were of a Different Nature than Us...To Be Able to Endure Such Sufferings

And that other reason too I will endeavor to bring forward from the Scriptures. But what was it? It was, that we might not say, when exhorted to the same virtue, that they were partakers of another nature, or were not men. On this account, a certain one speaking of the great Elias, says, *"Elias was a man of like passions with us* (James 5:17). Do you perceive, that he shows from a communion of suffering, that he was the same kind of man that we are? And again, I too am a man of like passions with you (Wisdom 7:1). And this guarantees a community of nature.

So That We May Learn What is True Happiness, and What is True Wretchedness

But that you may learn that this also teaches us to consider those blessed whom we ought to consider blessed, is evident from hence. For when you hear Paul saying, *Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place* (1 Corinthians 4:11) And again; *Whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives* (Hebrews 12:6). It is certain that it is not those who are enjoying quietness, but those who are in affliction for God's sake, and who are in tribulation, whom we must applaud, emulating those who live virtuously, and cultivate piety.



For so speaks the prophet: *Their right hand is a right hand of iniquity. Their daughters beautified, ornamented after the similitude of a temple. Their garners full, bursting from one into another; their sheep fruitful; abundant in their streets; their oxen fat.* There is no breaking down of the fence, nor passage through; nor clamor in their streets. They call the people blessed whose affairs are in this state. But what do you say, O prophet? Blessed, says he, the people whose God is the Lord; not the people affluent in wealth, but one adorned with godliness; that people, says he, I esteem happy, although they suffer innumerable hardships!

Other Reasons Why the Saints Suffer: To Inspire Hope For the Future

But if it were necessary to add a ninth reason, we might say, that this tribulation makes those who are troubled more approved; For tribulation works patience; and patience, probation; and probation, hope; and hope makes not ashamed (Romans 5:3-5).

Do you see that the probation, which comes of tribulation, fixes in us the hope of the good things to come, and that the abiding in trials causes us to have a good hope of the future? So that I did not say rashly, that these tribulations themselves

THUS MANY THEN BEING THE REASONS WHICH WE HAVE TO ADVANCE FOR THE AFFLICTIONS OF THE SAINTS, LET US NOT TAKE OUR TRIALS AMISS, OR BE DISTRESSED, OR DISTURBED ON ACCOUNT OF THEM; BUT BOTH OURSELVES DISCIPLINE OUR OWN SOULS, AND TEACH OTHERS TO DO THE SAME.

mark out to us hopes of a resurrection, and make those who are tried the better; for, he says, as gold is tried in a furnace, so an acceptable man in the furnace of humiliation (Sirach 2:3)

"Great Is Your Reward in Heaven"

There is besides a tenth reason to mention; and what is it, but the one I have before frequently referred to? Viz. that if we have any spots, we thus put them away. And the patriarch, making this matter plain, said to the rich man, Lazarus has received his evil things (Luke 16:25) hence he is comforted. And besides this, we may find another reason, which is to this effect; that our crowns and rewards are thus increased.

In proportion as tribulations are more intense, so also are the rewards augmented; yea, even far more: for the sufferings of the present time, it is said, are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).

Thus many then being the reasons which we have to advance for the afflictions of the saints, let us not take our trials amiss, or be distressed, or disturbed on account of them; but both ourselves discipline our own souls, and teach others to do the same.

We Should Not Lament Our Own Suffering, or the Suffering of Others

And if, O beloved, you see a man living in virtue, keeping fast hold of spiritual wisdom, pleasing God, yet suffering innumerable ills, do not stumble! And although you see any one devoting himself to spiritual affairs, and about to achieve something useful, yet presently supplanted, be not discouraged!

I know there are many who oftentimes propose a question to this effect: *Such a one, say they, was performing a pilgrimage to some Martyr's shrine; and while conveying money to the poor, met with a shipwreck, and lost all. Another man, in doing the like, fell among robbers, and scarcely saved his life, leaving the place in a state of nudity.*

What then should we say? Why that in neither of these cases need one be sad? For the one met with a shipwreck...yet he has the fruit of his righteousness complete inasmuch as he fulfilled all his own part. He collected the money together, he stowed it away, he took it with him, he departed on his pilgrimage; but the shipwreck that followed was not of his own will.

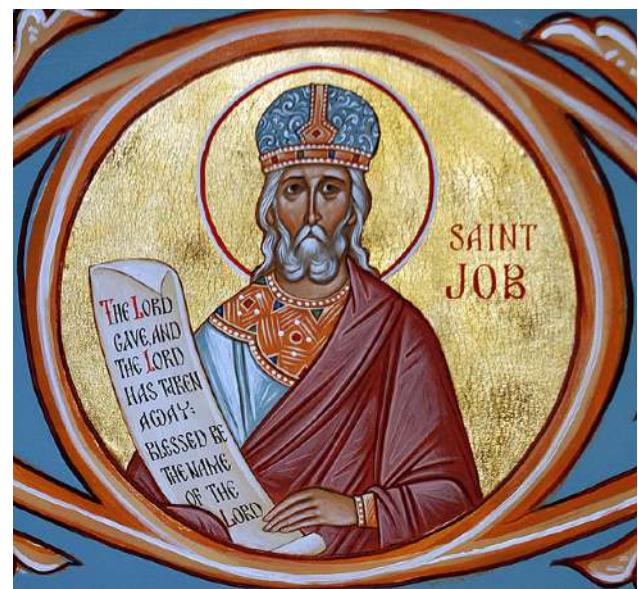
But why did God permit it? In order that he might make the man approved.

But, says one, the poor were deprived of the money. Thou dost not so care for the poor, as the God who made them? For if they were deprived of these things, He is able to provide a greater supply of wealth for them from another quarter.

Give Glory to God for All Things...as did Job the Sufferer

Let us not then call God to account for what He does; but let us give Him glory in all things. For it is not lightly and to no purpose that He often permits such events. But beside that He does not overlook those that would have enjoyed comfort from such wealth; and instead of it, affords them some other supply of sustenance.

God also makes him who suffers the shipwreck more approved, and provides him a greater reward; inasmuch as the giving thanks to God, when one falls into such calamities, is a far greater matter than giving alms. For not what we give in alms only, but whatever we have been deprived of by others, and borne it with fortitude; this too brings us much fruit.



That you may learn, that the latter is indeed the greater thing, I will make it evident from what befell Job.

Job when a possessor of wealth, opened his house to the poor, and whatever he had he bestowed; but he was not so illustrious when he opened his house to the poor, as when, upon hearing that his house had fallen down, he did not take it impatiently. Job was not illustrious when he clad the naked with the fleece of his flock, as he was illustrious and renowned when he heard that the fire had fallen, and consumed all his flocks, and yet gave thanks.

Before (suffering), Job was a lover of man. Now, he was a lover of Wisdom. Before, he had compassion on the poor; but now he gave thanks to the Lord! And he did not say to himself: *Why is it that this has happened? The flocks are consumed from which thousands of the poor were supported; and if I was unworthy to enjoy such plenty, at least He should have spared me for the sake of the partakers.* Nothing of this sort did Job utter, nor think, because he knew that God was dispensing all things for good.

That you may learn, moreover, that Job gave a heavier blow to the devil after this, when, being stripped of all things, he gave thanks, than when, being in possession of them, he gave alms. Observe, that when he was in possession, the devil could utter a certain suspicion, and however false, he yet could utter it: *Does Job serve you for nought?*

But when the devil had taken all, and stripped him of everything, and Job yet retained the same good will towards God, from that time the devil's shameless mouth was stopped, and had nothing further to allege. For the just man was more illustrious than in his former state. For to bear nobly and thankfully the privation of all things, is a far greater thing than it was to give alms while living in affluence; and it has been accordingly demonstrated in the case of this just man. Before, there was much benignity to his fellow-servants; now, there was exceeding love shown towards the Lord!

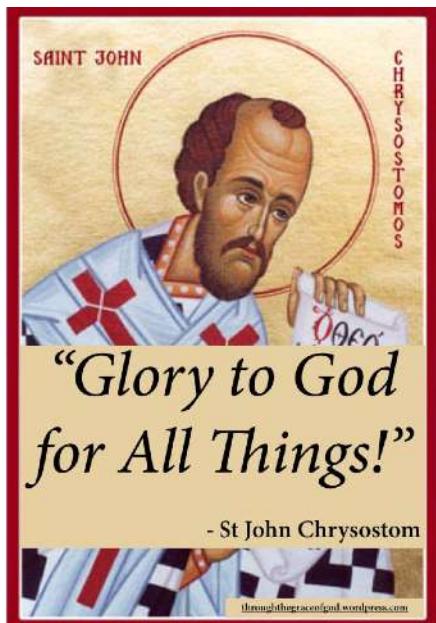
GOD ALSO MAKES HIM WHO SUFFERS THE SHIPWRECK MORE APPROVED, AND PROVIDES HIM A GREATER REWARD; INASMUCH AS THE GIVING THANKS TO GOD, WHEN ONE FALLS INTO SUCH CALAMITIES, IS A FAR GREATER MATTER THAN GIVING ALMS

What Should our Response Be to Suffering? Thanksgiving!

And I do not lengthen out this discourse without purpose; forasmuch as there are many, who, often while engaged in works of mercy, as supporting widows, have been spoiled of all their substance. Some again, by the accident of some fire, have lost

their all. Some have met with shipwreck. Others, false informations and injuries of that sort. Even though some may have done many almsdeeds, they have fallen into the extremes of poverty, sickness, and disease, and have obtained no help from any one. Lest we should say then, as many often do, No man knows anything; what has just been said may suffice to remove all perplexity on this point.

Suppose it is objected that such an one, after having done many almsdeeds, has lost all? And what if he had lost all? If he gives thanks for this loss, he will draw down much greater favor from God! And he will not receive twofold, as Job did, but a hundredfold in the life to come. But if here he does endure evil, the very circumstance of his sustaining all with fortitude will bring him a greater treasure; for God permits him to fall from plenty to poverty, for the purpose of calling him thus to the more frequent exercises, and greater conflicts.



Hath it happened as is often the case, that the fire seizing upon your house, has burnt it up and devoured all your substance? Remember what happened to Job: Give thanks to the Lord, who though he was able to forbid, did not forbid it; and you will receive as great a reward as if you had deposited all your wealth in the hands of the poor!

Do you spend your days in poverty and hunger, and in the midst of a thousand dangers? Remember Lazarus who had to buffet with disease, and poverty, and desolateness, and those other innumerable trials; and that after so high a degree of virtue!

Remember the Apostles, who lived in hunger, and thirst, and nakedness; the prophets, the patriarchs, the just men, and you will find all these not among the rich or luxurious, but among the poor, the afflicted, and the distressed!

Saying these things to yourself: Give thanks unto the Lord, that he has made you to be of this part, not hating you, but loving you greatly; since He would not have permitted those men either to suffer thus, if he had not exceedingly loved them, because He made them more illustrious by these evils.

The Devil Attacks the Hardest Those Who are Living a Virtuous Life

There is nothing so good as thanksgiving; even as there is nothing worse than blasphemy. We should not wonder that when we become intent upon spiritual things, we suffer much that is grievous. For as thieves do not dig through and

assiduously keep watch there, where there is hay, and chaff, and straw, but where there is gold and silver; so also the devil besets those especially who are engaged in spiritual matters.

Where virtue is, there are many snares! Where almsgiving is, there is envy! But we have one weapon which is the best, and sufficient to repel all such engines as these; in everything to give thanks to God.

Tell me, did not Abel, when offering the first fruits to God, fall by the hand of his brother? But yet God permitted it, not hating one who had honor him, but loving him greatly; and beside that which came of that excellent sacrifice, providing him another crown by martyrdom.

Moses wished to protect a certain one who was injured, and he was put into the extremest peril, and banished his country. This too God permitted, that you might learn the patience of the saints.

If foreknowing that we should suffer nothing of a grievous kind, we then put our hands to the work of religion, we should not seem to be doing anything great, as having such a pledge of safety. But as it is, those who do such things are the more to be wondered at, even for this; because, though they foresee dangers, and punishments, and deaths, and ten thousand evils, still they did not desist from those good works, nor become less zealous from the expectation of terrors.

As, therefore, the Three Children said: *There is a God in heaven, who is able to deliver us; and if not, let it be known unto you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, and that we will not worship the golden image which you have set up* (Daniel 3:17-18). Do thou also, when about to perform any duty to God, look forward to manifold dangers, manifold punishments, manifold deaths; and be not surprised, nor be disturbed, if such things happen. For it is said, *My Son, if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for temptation* (Ecclesiastes 2:1).

Surely no one choosing to fight, expects to carry off the crown without wounds! And thou, therefore, who hast undertaken to wage a complete combat with the devil, think not to pursue a life without danger, and full of luxury! God has not pledged to you His recompense and His promise here; but everything that is splendid for you in the future life!

FOR AS THIEVES DO NOT DIG THROUGH AND ASSIDUOUSLY KEEP WATCH THERE, WHERE THERE IS HAY, AND CHAFF, AND STRAW, BUT WHERE THERE IS GOLD AND SILVER; SO ALSO THE DEVIL BESETS THOSE ESPECIALLY WHO ARE ENGAGED IN SPIRITUAL MATTERS.

The Importance of Perseverance in the Midst of Suffering

Be glad and rejoice then, if when you have yourself done any good action, thou receive the contrary, or if you see another suffering this; inasmuch as this becomes to you the source of a higher recompense! Do not be downcast: nor give up your zeal, nor become the more torpid; but rather press onward with more eagerness; since even the Apostles, when they preached, although scourged, stoned, and constant inmates of the prisons, did not only after deliverance from dangers, but also in those very dangers, announce with greater forwardness the message of Truth.

Paul is to be seen in prison, yea, even in chains, instructing and initiating: and moreover doing the very same in a court of justice, in shipwreck, in tempest, and in a thousand dangers. Do thou too imitate these saints, and cease not from good works, so long as you are able.

Although you see the devil thwarting you ten thousand times, never fall back! Thou perchance, bearing with you your wealth, hast met with shipwreck; but Paul carrying the word, far more precious than all wealth, was going to Rome, and was wrecked; and sustained innumerable hardships. And this he himself signified, when he said, *Many times we desired to come unto you, but Satan hindered us* (1 Thessalonians 2:18). And God permitted it; thus revealing the more abundantly His power, and showing that the multitude of things which the devil did, or prevented from being done, neither lessened nor interrupted the preaching of the Gospel. On this account Paul gave God thanks in all things; and knowing that he was himself thereby rendered more approved, he exhibited his exceeding forwardness on every occasion, letting none of these impediments prevent him!

Suffering is a Way for Us to Show our Love for God

As often then as we are frustrated in spiritual works, so often let us again take them in hand; and let us not say, for what reason did God permit these impediments? For He permitted them to this end: that He might show your alacrity much more to others, and your great love; this being the special mark of one that loves, never to desist from those things which are approved by him whom he loves.

The man, indeed, who is flaccid and listless, will fall back from the first shock; but he who is energetic and alert, although he be hindered a thousand times, will devote himself so much the more to the things of God; fulfilling all as far as he is able; and in everything giving thanks. This then let us do! Thanksgiving is a great treasure; large wealth; a good that cannot be taken away; a powerful weapon!

Even as blasphemy increases our present mishap; and makes us lose much more beside than we have lost already. Have you lost money? If you have been thankful, you

have gained your soul; and obtained greater wealth; having acquired a greater measure of the favor of God. But if you blaspheme, you have, besides this, lost your own safety; and hast not regained possession of your wealth; yea and your soul, which you had, you have sacrificed!

A Plea from St. John to Publicly Stop The Blaspheming of God

But since our discourse has now turned to the subject of blasphemy, I desire to ask one favor of you all, in return for this my address, and speaking with you; which is, that you will correct on my behalf the blasphemers of this city. And should you hear any one in the public thoroughfare, or in the midst of the forum, blaspheming God; go up to him and rebuke him; and should it be necessary to inflict blows, spare not to do so.

THANKSGIVING IS A GREAT TREASURE, A LARGE WEALTH, A GOOD THAT CANNOT BE TAKEN AWAY...AND A POWERFUL WEAPON!

Smite him on the face; strike his mouth; sanctify your hand with the blow, and if any should accuse you, and drag you to the place of justice, follow them there; and when the judge on the bench calls you to account, say boldly that the man blasphemed the King of angels! For if it be necessary to punish those

who blaspheme an earthly king, much more so those who insult God.

It is a common crime, a public injury, and it is lawful for every one who is willing, to bring forward an accusation. Let the Jews and Greeks learn, that the Christians are the saviors of the city...that they are its guardians, its patrons, and its teachers. Let the dissolute and the perverse also learn this; that they must fear the servants of God too; that if at any time they are inclined to utter such a thing, they may look round every way at each other, and tremble even at their own shadows, anxious lest perchance a Christian, having heard what they said, should spring upon them and sharply chastise them.

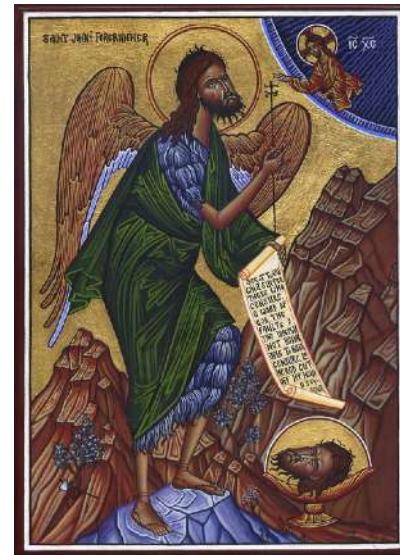
Have you not heard what John did? He saw a man that was a tyrant overthrowing the laws of marriage; and with boldness, he proclaimed in the midst of the forum, It is not lawful for you to have your brother Philip's wife (Mark 6:18). But I urge you on, not against a prince or a judge; nor against the marriage ordinance outraged; nor in behalf of fellow-servants insulted. But I require you to castigate an equal, for insolence against the Lord. Truly, if I had said to you, punish and correct those kings or judges who transgress the laws, would you not say that I was mad? But John forsooth acted thus...so that even this is not too much for us.

Now then, at least, correct a fellow-servant; an equal; and although it should be necessary to die, do not shrink from chastising a brother. This is your martyrdom, since

John was also a martyr. And although he was not commanded to sacrifice, nor to worship an idol, yet for the sacred laws that were despised, he laid down his head. Do thou too then contend, even to the death, for the truth, and God will fight for you! And make me not this cold reply. What matters it to me? I have nothing in common with him. With the devil alone we have nothing in common, but with all men we have many things in common; for they partake of the same nature with us; they inhabit the same earth, and they are nourished with the same food; they have the same Lord; they have received the same laws, and are invited to the same blessings with ourselves. Let us not say then, that we have nothing in common with them; for this is a satanic speech; a diabolical inhumanity. Therefore let us not give utterance to such words, but exhibit such a tender care as becomes brethren!

This indeed I, for my part, engage with the strictest certainty, and pledge myself to you all, that if all you who are present will but choose to take in hand the safety of the inhabitants of this city, we shall speedily have it amended throughout. And this, even although but the least part of the city is here; the least as to multitude, but the chief part as it respects piety.

Let us take in hand the safety of our brethren! One man inflamed with zeal is sufficient to reform a whole community! But when not merely one, or two, or three, but so great a multitude are able to take on them the care of the neglected, it is in no other way but by our own supineness, and not from our want of strength, that the majority perish and fall. Is it not indeed absurd? When we happen to see a fight taking place in the forum, we go into the midst of it, and reconcile the combatants! But why do I speak of a fight? If, perchance, we see an ass fallen down, we all make haste to stretch out a hand to raise him up. Yet we neglect our perishing brethren! The blasphemer is an ass; unable to bear the burden of his anger, he has fallen. Come forward and raise him up, both by words and by deeds; and both by meekness and by vehemence; let the medicine be various. And if we thus administer our own part, and take pains for the safety of our neighbors, we shall soon become objects of desire and affection to the very persons who have the benefit of our correction; and what is more than all, we shall enjoy those good things which are laid up in store. Which God grant that we may all obtain, by the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom and with whom, to the Father with the Holy Ghost, be glory and power and honor, both now and always, and forever and ever. Amen.



WEEK 13: THE MYSTERY OF DEATH



Observation or Question # 1 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 2 from Online Class:

Observation or Question # 3 from Online Class:

THE ANCIENT CHRISTIAN BURIAL SERVICE

Excerpts from Psalms

The Orthodox Funeral Service begins with the priest reading from Psalm 118 (119) on behalf of the penitent who has fallen asleep. What this psalm highlights is what it means to have a "blameless walk". This blameless walk is the way in which we prepare for the day of our death. Christ Himself lived and died this way; and through Him, we who believe are to live and die in this way also.

Reading this psalm outside of the funeral service is a wonderful exercise which helps us prepare for our own falling asleep.

Here are some of the powerful excerpts from that psalm:

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with their whole heart! You have commanded us to keep Your precepts diligently! Oh that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes! Then I would not be ashamed, when I look into all Your commandments. I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgments. I will keep Your statutes, Oh, do not forsake me utterly!



Your hands have made and fashioned me: Give me understanding that I may learn your commandments. Those who fear You will be glad when they see me, because I have hoped in Your word. I know, O Lord, that Your judgements are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me. Let, I pray, Your tender mercies come to me that I may live; for Your law is my flight. Let the proud be ashamed, for they treated me wrongfully with falsehood; but I will meditate on Your precepts. Let those who fear You turn to me, those who know Your testimonies. Let my heart be blameless regarding Your statutes, that I many not be ashamed.

Let my cry come before You. O Lord; give me understanding according to Your word. Let my supplications come before You, deliver me according to Your word. My lips shall utter praise, for You teach me your statutes. My tongue shall speak of Your word, for

all Your commandments are righteousness. Let Your hand become my help, for I have chosen your precepts. I long for Your salvation, O Lord, and Your law is my delight. Let my soul live, and it shall praise You; and let Your judgements help me. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments.

An Emphasis on the Resurrection

One of the common things that you will hear about in the Ancient Christian Funeral Service, is a lot of hymns surrounding the importance of the Resurrection. The Orthodox have such a strong hope in the resurrection, that you will rarely hear the words "death" or "dead" in the service, but rather words like "fallen asleep" or "departed", showing that this state is only temporary!

"Give rest to the soul of Your servant O God, and establish them in paradise, where the choir and the saints of the just O Lord, shine like the stars of heaven. Give rest to Your servants who have fallen asleep, overlooking all their transgressions!"



-Troparia of the Resurrection

"O our Savior, give rest with the just to Your servant, and establish them in Your courts as it is written. Disregard their transgressions both voluntary and involuntary, committed in knowledge or in ignorance, for You are good and love mankind"

-Kathisma Hymn

Themes from the Canon

In the middle of the service, we sing hymns having to do with Old Testament Themes, like Israel passing on foot over the sea, singing a song of victory. We also have a reference to the sea being like our lives here on earth:

"As I behold the sea of life, swelling with raging storms, I run to Your calm haven and I cry unto Thee, "Raise my life from corruption, O greatly merciful one!"

If we think about our lives, there are so many ups and downs, peaks and valleys, waves of temptations, and periods of peace...very similar to being in an ocean. This part of the canon is the departed Christian's call to God, to bring them out of all of the turbulence of life, and enter into the calm haven that is Jesus Christ.

St. John of Damascus

St. John (7th Century) wrote this incredible hymn which was inserted into the Funeral service, which highlights what our attitude should be towards death and the resurrection:

"I weep and I wail when I contemplate death. I see our beauty created in God's image, laid in a grave without form or glory. O Wonder! What is this great mystery concerning us? How have we been handed over to corruption? How have we been wedded to death? Truly as it is written, the commandment of God has ordained all of this, our God who gives the departed rest."

Themes from the Beatitudes:

Before the Epistle and Gospel are read, the priest will begin reading the Beatitudes, which highlight what we areas we should be focusing on in life that are considered "blessed". In the middle of the beatitudes, the priest reads verses concerning the new life of the departed:

"You made the wise thief a citizen of paradise, O Christ, because of his repentance on the cross when he cried to you: "Remember me O Lord, Make me a sinner worthy of the same."

"May Christ give you rest in the land of the living, and may the gates of paradise be open for you. May He make you a citizen of His Kingdom and forgive you your sins, for you have loved Christ."

This theme of "remember me" is common language in the funeral service. We sing "memory eternal" at the every end of the service as well. This theme serves two purposes. The first is that we all should never forget the departed. The second is so that the deceased will continue to be in the memory of God, because if God "forgets us", if He says "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23), we are led to spiritual extinction. But if He remembers us like He remembered the thief on the cross who asked Christ to remember him, we also will live eternally with our Lord in paradise.



The Last Kiss

After the Epistle and Gospel reading (Thessalonians 4:13-17 and John 5:24-30), the faithful all have the opportunity to come and give a last kiss to they that have fallen asleep. There is a beautiful hymn that is sung while the faithful come up, which reminds us of what we are doing in that moment:

"Come, let us give the last kiss unto the dead, rendering thanks unto God. For they have vanished from among their kind and press onward to the grave, and they trouble themselves no longer with vanities, or with the flesh which suffers sore distress."

"Unto what shall our life be compared? Truly a flower or a vapor or the dew of morning. Come, therefore, let us gaze intently at the grave. Where is the beauty of the body? Where is its youth? Where are the eyes and the fleshly form? Like the grass they have perished? They have all been destroyed. Come therefore, let us bow down in humble submissiveness with tears before the feet of Christ."

"As we gaze on the dead who lies before us, let us all accept this example of our own last hour. For they vanish from the earth like smoke. Like a flower they have faded. Like grass they have been cut down. Swathed in a coarse garment they are concealed in the earth. As we leave them hidden from sight, let us beseech Christ our God that He will give the departed rest!"



CHRIST IS RISEN! INDEED HE IS RISEN!